

VERNAL DOWNTOWN PLAN

OCTOBER 2021



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We also thank all the community members, business owners, and property owners who contributed their insights.

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A large, stylized white dinosaur sculpture, possibly a Brachiosaurus, is the central focus. It has a long neck, a small head with a single large eye, and a long tail. It is holding a rectangular sign with its right front arm.

Vernal
UTAH'S DINOSAUR
LAND

A large, stylized white dinosaur sculpture, possibly a Brachiosaurus, is the central focus. It has a long neck, a small head with a single large eye, and a long tail. It is holding a rectangular sign with its right front arm.

VERNAL CITY
WELCOMES YOU





1. INTRODUCTION



INTRODUCTION

This Vernal Downtown Plan establishes the vision, goals, and strategies, which will guide the future of Downtown Vernal. It is written to guide redevelopment efforts by the Vernal City, Uintah County, private property owners, and business owners. The plan focuses on nine blocks (indicated on page 1.10) and incorporates revitalization efforts focused on placemaking and enhanced connectivity to promote the creation of an identifiable and vibrant downtown. The aim is to diversify our economy, foster community pride, and build entrepreneurial spirit.

Located in Uintah County, Vernal has prospered from the oil and natural gas industry and more recently, as a tourist center for the High Uintas Primitive Area within Ashley National Forest, Red Fleet State Park, Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, and Dinosaur National Monument. Even with these economic drivers, Main Street features many vacant store fronts and streets throughout the city are quiet after 5PM. Vernal community members have voiced their desire for updated building facades, a greater diversity of commerce, and more

comfortable and safe walking experiences. The first key step in this planning process is to understand existing conditions and the needs to be addressed.

With more people working remotely and looking to leave large cities in exchange for greater access to natural areas and recreation, while maintaining access to robust internet connectivity and community events, Vernal has already seen an uptick to recent development and investment within their city. Outdoor recreation hubs like Moab are increasingly congested and outdoor enthusiasts are seeking alternative destinations.

This document outlines a unique redevelopment vision for the nine blocks and the specific actions which are likely to encourage investment in that vision. Concurrent to these efforts, the City has begun the process of creating a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA). These plans are meant to be complementary and provide the City with a variety of revitalization recommendations resulting in an active memorable downtown for people.

PROJECT BACKGROUND

The Vernal Downtown Plan is an exciting and timely planning effort. Downtown revitalization has been a topic of interest among community member for some time. The Uintah Basin economy has been struggling and on the decline for almost a decade. Unemployment in the area hit as high as 13% in 2020, as a result of impacts from COVID-19 and the downturn in the mineral extraction business.

The historic downtown exhibits indicators of becoming but is relatively quiet most evenings except for the traffic passing through on Highway 40. Pedestrian traffic is minimal. Just outside of Vernal, Dinosaur National Monument welcomes over 300,000 visitors a year. The Utah Field House of Natural History State Park Museum is located on the edge of the downtown area and hosts 100,000 visitors a year. Despite these major attractions, in general, visitors and tourists are not drawn into the downtown district to shop, dine, walk, and explore.

In recent years, the number of events in Downtown Vernal has multiplied and have been attended by thousands of people. Downtown Vernal has significant potential to become a retail hub with community events, activities, and walkable areas. A vibrant Downtown Vernal will attract local residents, visitors and tourists to shop, dine, live and play. The Vernal Downtown Plan is funded by the Utah Department of Transportation (UDOT) and the Community Improvement Board planning funds alongside Vernal City and Uintah County. It is a reflection of the community's hopes and ideas and provides a way forward to realizing a revitalized Downtown Vernal.



Source: Basin Now

PROJECT VISION AND PURPOSE

The overall project Vision is to create a downtown that is comprised of four guiding principles:

- Unique and Memorable
- Place for Business
- Place for People
- Active

In the following chapter, these qualities are further identified as the project's Cornerstones, which serve as guides to the planning process. The goals and strategies outlined will reference the Cornerstones as foundational principles behind the decision-making process throughout the development of the plan.

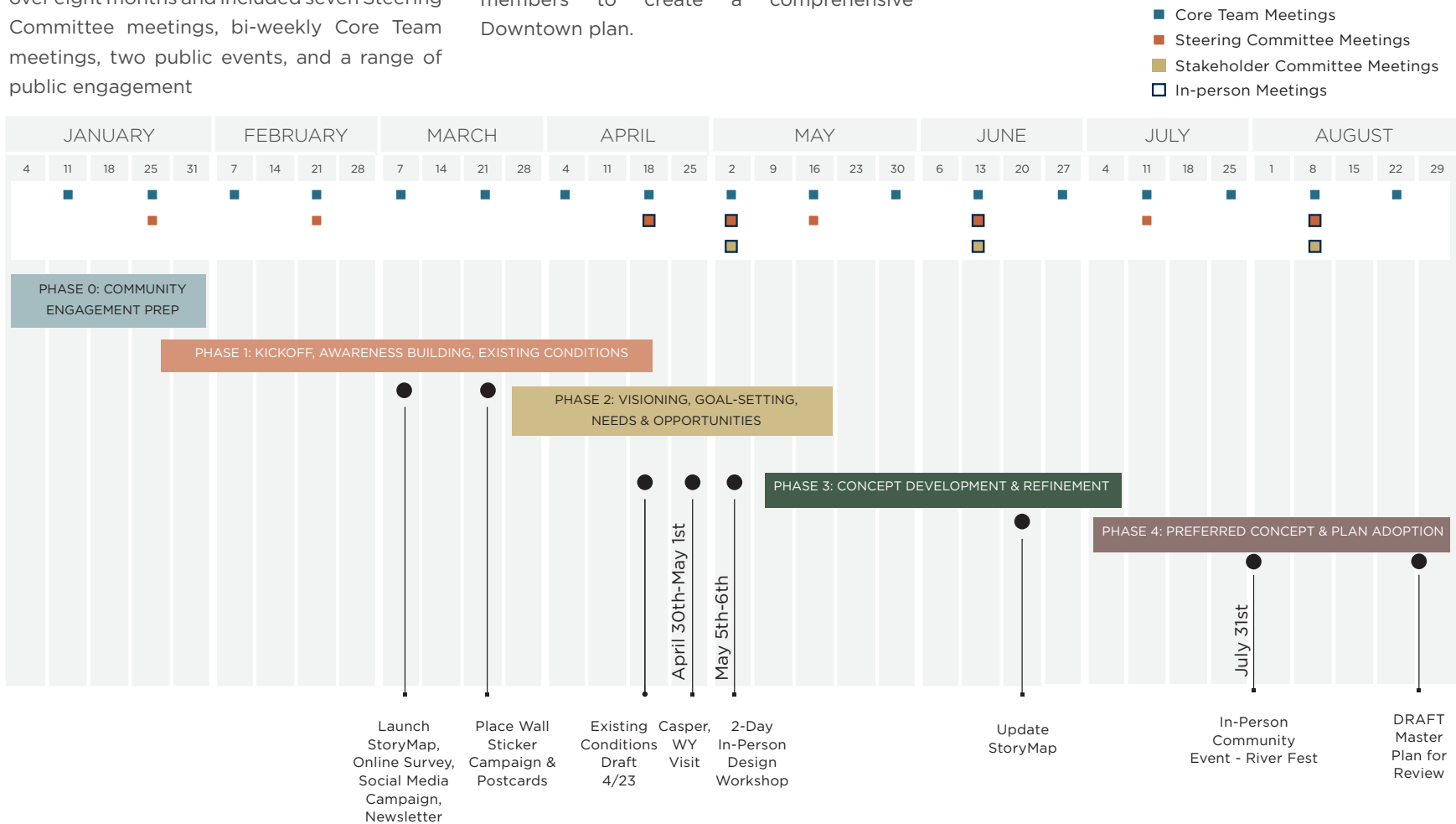
The project's purpose is to identify how these four Cornerstones are to be realized in a way that is both economically viable and creates a walkable downtown with diverse shopping options, a cohesive design, and public gathering spaces.



PROJECT TIMELINE

Commencing at the beginning of 2021, the Vernal Downtown Plan has been developed over eight months and included seven Steering Committee meetings, bi-weekly Core Team meetings, two public events, and a range of public engagement

touch points that aimed to inform, engage, empower and collaborate with community members to create a comprehensive Downtown plan.



PROJECT GOALS

The Vernal Downtown Plan Existing Conditions Report captures information about Vernal's downtown as it is today. Recording this information as a baseline for future planning efforts is important.

This document provides snapshots of the study area through the lenses of its downtown characteristics, today's market conditions, its culture and events, and the transportation infrastructure.

Thoroughly understanding and analyzing these components of the downtown will enable future planning efforts to build on strengths, address weaknesses, and fully realize unique opportunities in Vernal.

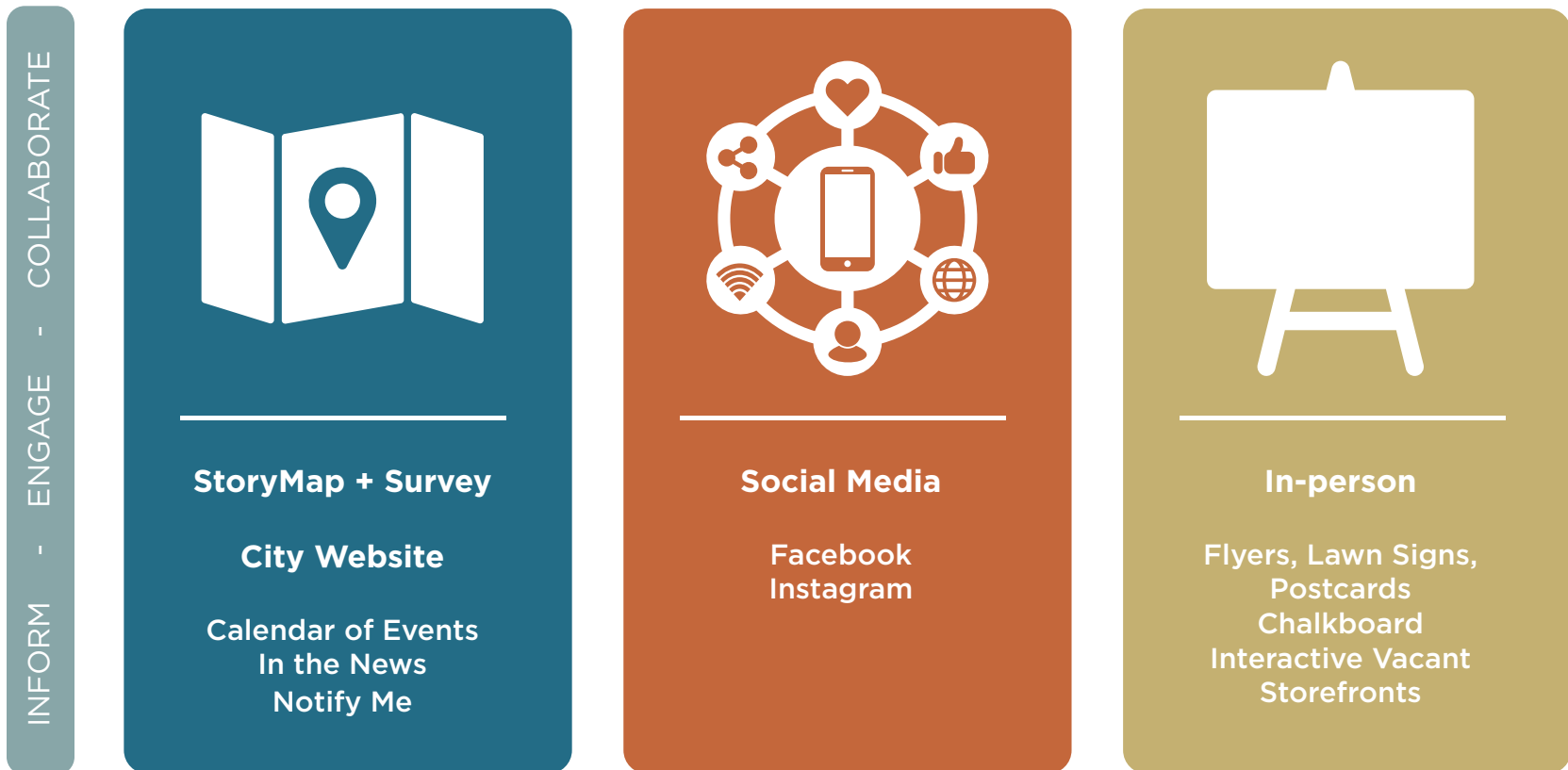
The project goals below identify the successful process, approach, and objectives of the planning process for the Vernal Downtown Plan. The goals represent the aligned needs of the project partners and their mutually beneficial outcomes.

PROJECT GOALS	
1	DEFINE THE AREA CHARACTERISTICS BASED ON INFORMATION GATHERED FROM INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS AND FROM EXISTING STUDIES.
2	BASED ON A COMPREHENSIVE UNDERSTANDING OF THE AREA, WORK WITH VERNAL CITY, UINTAH COUNTY, UDOT AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS TO DEVELOP GOALS AND OBJECTIVES.
3	IDENTIFY PROBLEMS, NEEDS, AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE AREA AND PROVIDE VERNAL CITY, UINTAH COUNTY, UDOT AND LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS WITH REASONABLE, IMPLEMENTABLE SHORT- AND LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS THAT MEET THE GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE AREA.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SUMMARY

Community engagement was a critical element in the Downtown planning process and is covered in depth in the Chapter 3 of this document, Vernal's Voice. A full summary of input gathered is found in Appendix B.

The overarching strategy behind the community engagement employed during this plan was to Inform, Engage, and Collaborate with the public in a variety of ways. The diagram below articulates the methods used under each of these three categories.



Community Engagement Strategy

CITY CONTEXT

Vernal is the county seat and largest city in Uintah County. As such, it hosts several County facilities. The County library, regional history center, community and recreation center, Western Park and Fairgrounds, and conference center are all located within or adjacent to the City's boundaries. Furthermore, there are several region-serving facilities and institutions such as the Ashley Regional Medical Center and the Field House of Natural History. Just outside Vernal's City boundaries are the Vernal Regional Airport, Uintah Basin Technical College, Utah State University Vernal Campus, and Uintah High School. Vernal holds significant potential for capitalizing on its high concentration of regional facilities and amenities.

See the next page for a map of the City and its many destinations.



Uintah Conference Center



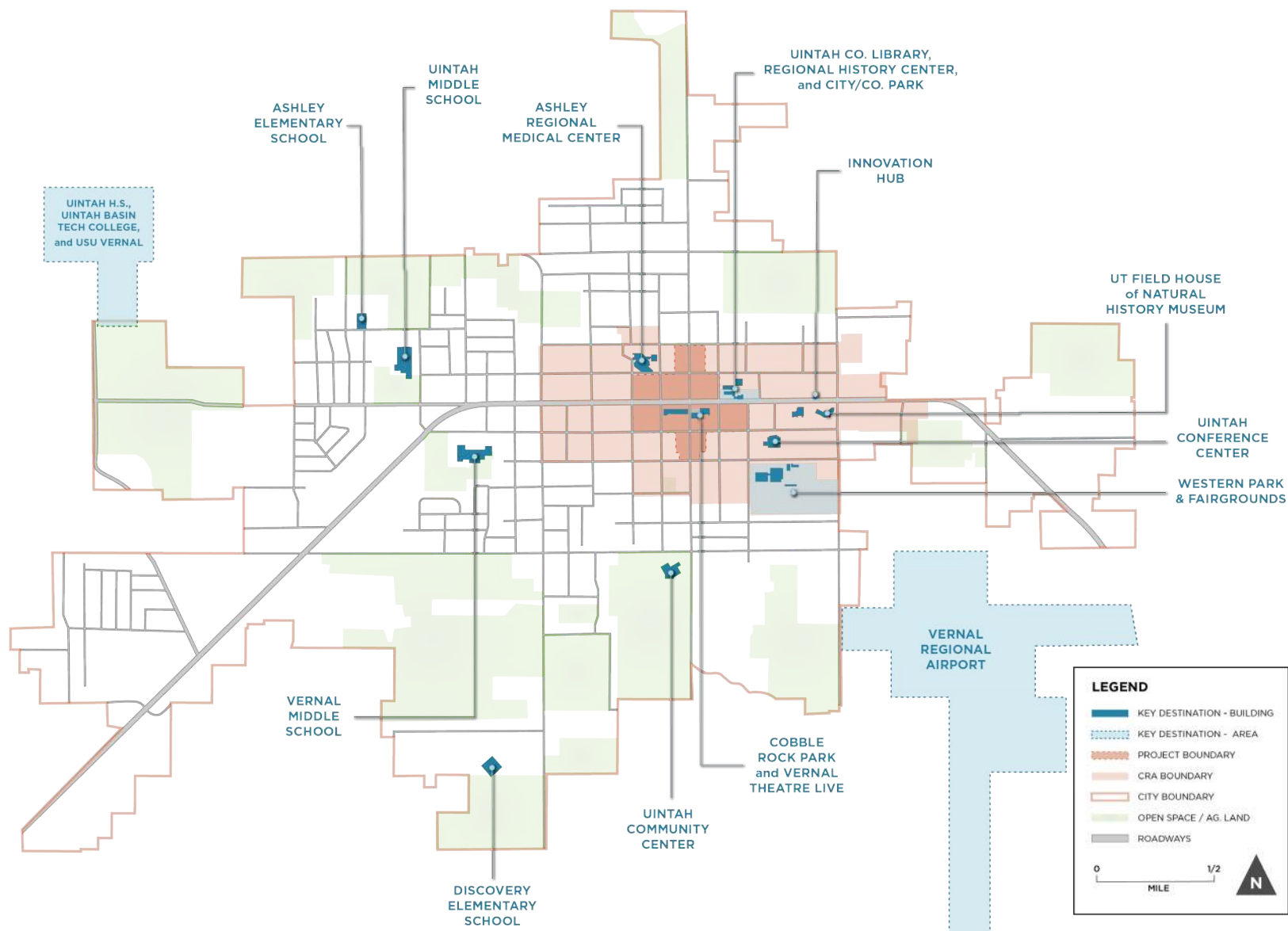
Utah Field House of Natural History State Park Museum



Uintah Community Center



Utah State University Vernal Campus



Vernal City Destinations & Project Context

STUDY AREA

Vernal's downtown features a small, yet attractive core consisting of several blocks defined by consistent low-rise, pedestrian-oriented building forms. Downtown's blocks are organized by a western grid pattern which exhibits the qualities of walkability, strong relationship between building to street, and numerous corners for shop displays. This Downtown Plan will specifically address leveraging these assets, to revitalize the nine blocks within the study area boundary shown to the right. The concepts in the plan can be easily applied to other downtown areas outside of the study area.

The built form in downtown evokes the feeling of a classic rural Main Street and includes historic buildings from many different decades and even a movie theater marquee. Despite these strong "bones," downtown has many vacancies and feels outdated and shows lack of continued investments. Additionally, the historic character of Downtown is interrupted by the significant, and sometimes high-speed, truck traffic passing through on Main Street. Main Streets like Vernal's were often formed to stand in stark contrast to the omnipresent openness of the wide expanse of the western landscape surrounding many small towns connected by a highway system.



COORDINATION WITH CRA EFFORT

Vernal City is currently considering the feasibility and applicability of creating a Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) for an area of downtown that includes the study area.

A CRA IS AN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOL THAT ALLOWS FOR THE CAPTURE OF NEW VALUE IN AN AREA, VIA GROWTH IN PROPERTY TAXES (NOT NEW TAXES OR INCREASING PROPERTY TAXES), TO BE SPENT FOR SPECIFIC PURPOSES WITHIN A DEFINED AREA.

For Vernal, the City (and particularly the City Council which comprises the redevelopment agency) desires to see the downtown core receive investment for a variety of purposes, including parking updates, landscaping, road improvements, infrastructure, façade programs, and potential land acquisition. Incentives, programs, and matching grants funded by the CRA, which will provide greater opportunities for improving local businesses and overall capacity for development.

Funding for a CRA is achievable through cooperative efforts from the taxing entities in the area, including the county, school district, city, etc. These entities agree to commit a portion of the new growth (or increment) for reinvestment into the project area. For Vernal and the taxing entities, this reinvestment is coupled with anticipation or other benefits (more sales tax, TRT taxes, more visitors, more jobs, etc.). Without the CRA and the investments, it is unlikely that growth will occur at the status quo rate.

Current efforts for the creation of a CRA include educational outreach to the taxing entities and an initial understanding of how much increment could possibly be generated. Additional steps will include defining of project area boundaries, agreements with taxing entities, and public hearings and meetings with affected property owners. Furthermore, a key step for Vernal will be to establish policy guidelines for the use of increment once it is generated. These guidelines will help shape what is feasible in Vernal's downtown and will aid in defining what projects are best use of the funds.

For a large scale development to qualify for tax increment, it will need to prove the argument that its development would not have occurred naturally with market conditions and that the increment is necessary in order to facilitate the proposed project.



2. DOWNTOWN VISION

VISION, GOALS & STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION

The following chapter outlines the Vernal Downtown Plan vision, associated goals and supporting strategies for implementation. This chapter is the result of a robust community engagement process, frequent collaborations with the project Steering and Stakeholder Committees, as well as review by the public and elected officials.

PLAN CORNERSTONES

The cornerstone is the first stone located in a construction of a masonry foundation, about which all other points of construction will be measured. Just as the cornerstone is the first stone set in construction of a masonry foundation, the Vernal Downtown Plan cornerstones will guide all other aspects of the Vernal Downtown Plan. The best plans have cornerstones, sometimes know as guiding principles, to guide the process and ensure a successful outcome. All goals, strategies, and desired outcomes are aligned with these cornerstones.



ICONIC & MEMORABLE

Downtown Vernal is a destination that reflects its local and regional assets, past, traditions, and heritage. It's unique identity is present throughout downtown.



ICONIC & MEMORABLE

Goal 01:

Build upon and expand the “Dinosaurland” brand for Downtown Vernal with complementary themes of natural resource amenities and outdoor recreation.

STRATEGIES:

- Create a welcoming sense of arrival at the key intersection of Main Street & Vernal Avenue by incorporating significant art, lighting, and similar elements to support sense of place.
- Incorporate planted medians with unique lighting, signage and art on Main Street & Vernal Avenue where feasible.
- Add distinctive gateway signage at the four entrances to the Downtown Core District.

Goal 02:

Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining & shopping and resolve parking challenges.

STRATEGIES:

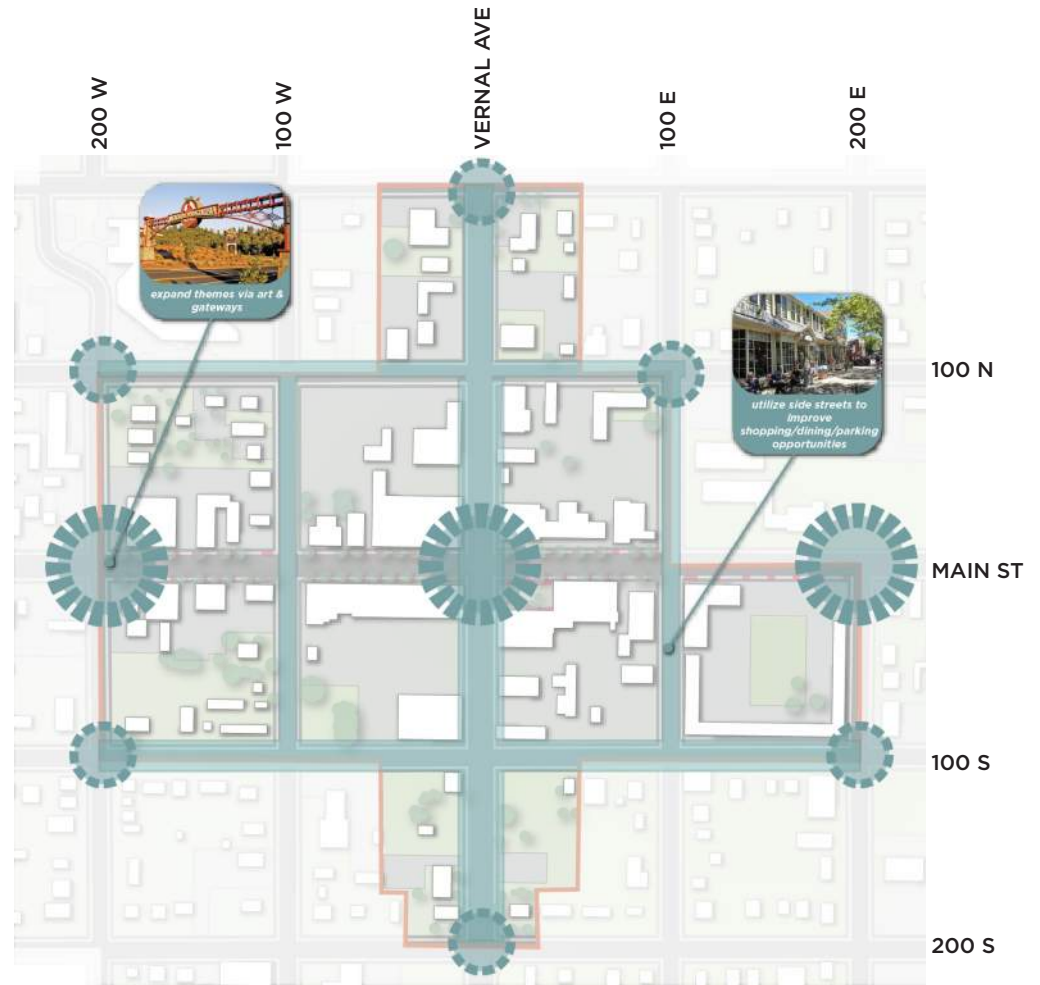
- Create a boulevard atmosphere on Vernal Ave.
- Develop a program with incentives to encourage sidewalk dining and shopping.
- Angled parking where feasible for vehicles.
- Identify large vehicle parking locations.

Goal 03:

Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal’s Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district.

STRATEGIES:

- Support programs to continually enhance Downtown Vernal’s streetscape experience, particularly for people walking.
- Encourage “park-once” approach with intuitive parking and wayfinding signs for pedestrians.
- Signage along highway to downtown.



LEGEND

goal one:
opportunities for expanding themes

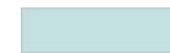


primary



secondary

goal two:
side streets & parking challenges



side streets



ICONIC & MEMORABLE

GOAL	STRATEGY	PROJECT	PROGRAM	FUNDING/ POLICY
Build upon and expand the “Dinosaurland” brand for Downtown Vernal with complementary themes of natural resource amenities and outdoor recreation.	<i>Create a welcoming sense of arrival at the key intersection of Main Street & Vernal Avenue by incorporating significant art, lighting, and similar elements to support sense of place.</i>	Expand/Enhance Themes		
	<i>Incorporate planted medians with unique lighting, signage and art on Main Street & Vernal Avenue where feasible.</i>	Paint Utility Boxes	Art Piece Program	
		Incorporate Music	Street Performers	
	<i>Add distinctive gateway signage at the four entrances to the Downtown Core District.</i>	Gateway Signage Addition	Signage Program	Combination of CIB loans, UDOT Grants, and revitalization funds
Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining & shopping and resolve parking challenges.	<i>Create a boulevard atmosphere on Vernal Ave.</i>		Façade Improvement Program	
	<i>Develop a program with incentives to encourage sidewalk dining and shopping.</i>	Façade Incentive		CRA Incentives
	<i>Angled parking where feasible for vehicles.</i>	Perform Downtown Parking Assessment	New Parking Programs	Special Assessment Area and UDOT Grant
	<i>Identify large vehicle parking locations.</i>	Designate &/or build large vehicle parking	New Parking Programs	Special Assessment Area and UDOT Grant
Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal’s Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district.	<i>Encourage “park-once” approach with intuitive parking and wayfinding signs for pedestrians.</i>	Surface parking improvements	New Parking Programs	A combination of Revitalization Funds and Grants
	<i>Support programs to continually celebrate the historic nature of Vernal’s Downtown.</i>		Contribute to and refine downtown interpretive sign	
	<i>Signage along highway to downtown.</i>	Signs at 1500 & 2500 S to direct visitors to Vernal	Signage Program	A combination of Special Assessment Areas, Revitalization Funds, and Grants



THE PLACE FOR PEOPLE

Downtown attracts locals and visitors with places for people to gather, building community, and experience Vernal's unique culture. It fosters social connections 18 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year, and keeps people coming back again and again.



PLACE FOR PEOPLE

Goal 01:

Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively downtown experience.

STRATEGIES:

- Enhance and support changes to increase consistency of Downtown Vernal's streetscape experience, especially on Vernal Avenue and Main Street.
- Focus projects and programs on efforts to enhance the nightlife experience in downtown.

Goal 02:

Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery, & experience.

STRATEGIES:

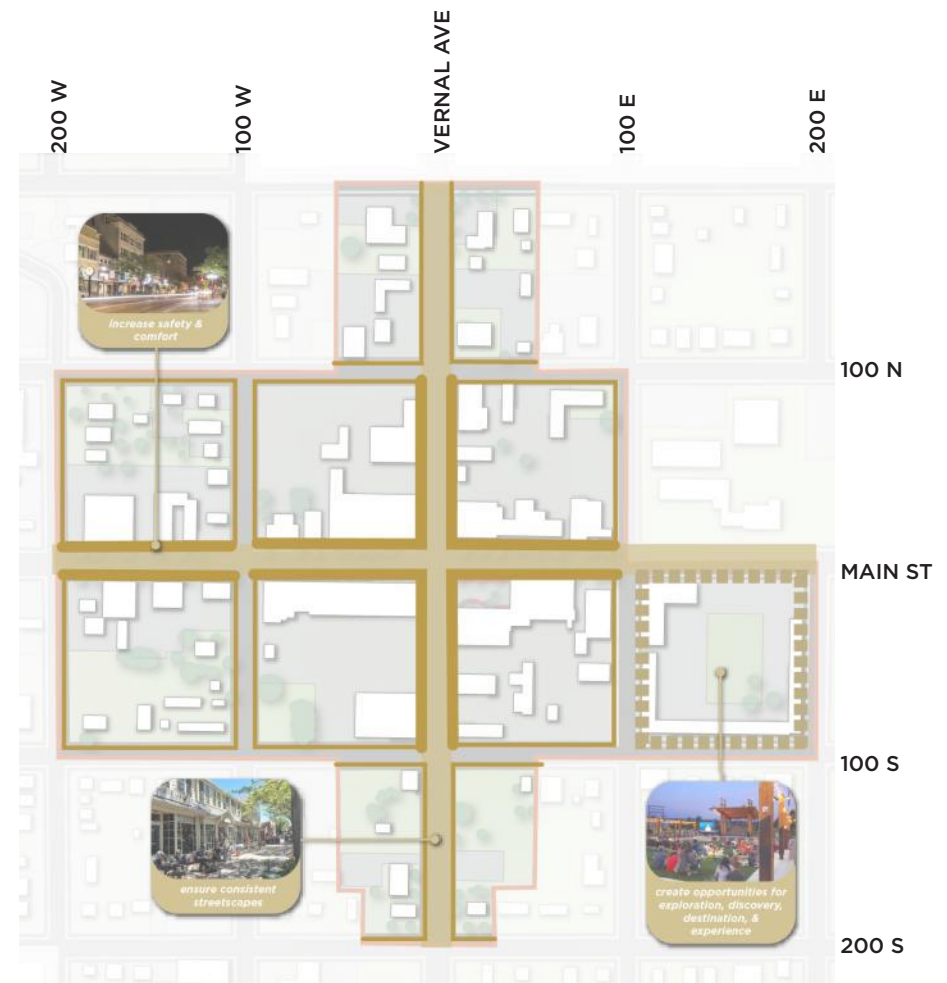
- Increase opportunities for outdoor dining.
- Identify a catalytic block in downtown to redevelop as a multi-use area/central gathering space for events.
- Encourage mid-block access between Main St. and building rear for outdoor dining and other experiential opportunities.
- Increase event programming to support year-round events.

Goal 03:

Build upon existing successful streetscape elements to enhance beauty, safety & comfort in downtown.

STRATEGIES:

- Add public restrooms & drinking fountains at strategic locations.
- Expand business awnings & street trees.
- Increase seating opportunities.
- Improve lighting to increase perception of safety.
- Support bulb-out planters at intersections.
- Consider landscape buffers between street and sidewalk, where space is available.



LEGEND

goal one:
consistent streetscape



streets that require
consistency

goal two:
opportunities for exploration, discovery,
destination, & experience



Lamplighter
Property

goal three:
increase safety & comfort



primary secondary

areas for improved
streetscape amenities



PLACE FOR PEOPLE

GOAL

STRATEGY

PROJECT

PROGRAM

POLICY

Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent downtown experience.	Enhance and support changes to increase consistency of Downtown Vernal's streetscape experience	Street Performers		
		Paint Utility Boxes	Art Piece Program	
		Walking Boulevards	Façade Improvement Program	CRA Incentives
Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery, & experience.	Increase the opportunities for outdoor dining	Patio Dining		
	Transform available property into a multi-use area / central gathering space	Gathering Areas That May Have Themed Elements Such as Dinosaur Benches	Key Area Redevelopment Key Area Redevelopment	Combination of CIB Loans, Brownsfield Grants, Revitalization Funds and Rural Economic Grants
	Create a destination gathering space	Element such as an Iconic Dinosaur to Draw Visitors		
	Expand the Western Park Amphitheater Space	Park Improvement Project		
	Increase event programming	More Winter Festivals		
		Cultural Festivals		
		Mural Stroll		

GOAL	STRATEGY	PROJECT	PROGRAM	FUNDING/ POLICY
Build upon existing successful streetscape elements to enhance beauty, safety & comfort in downtown.	<i>Add public restrooms in the Visitor's Center</i>	Public Amenity Project		
	<i>Include drinking fountains at Cobble Rock Park, and at other strategic locations throughout Downtown Vernal</i>			
	<i>Increase the number of awnings along business storefronts</i>	Business Owner Engagement	Façade Improvement Program	CRA Incentives
	<i>Extend the iconic tree-lined streets to adjacent streets, such as Vernal Ave, to increase canopy coverage</i>	Increase Street Trees		
	<i>Expand the opportunities for people to sit</i>	Public Amenity Project		
	<i>Improve lighting throughout downtown</i>	Business Owner Engagement	Façade Improvement Program	CRA Incentives
	<i>Support the addition of bulb out planters at intersections</i>	Add Bulb Outs Along Main Street	Key Area Redevelopment	UDOT Grant
	<i>Consider landscape buffers between street and sidewalk, where space is available</i>	Street Beautification with Planting		

A blue-tinted photograph of a handshake in front of a menu board. The menu board lists items like 'PAPA', 'BEST BITTER', 'ON LAGER', 'SODA BOTTLE', 'WICH OIL', 'LUPULON', 'PAPA', and 'TERRAZZO' with prices. The handshake is in the foreground, and the menu board is in the background.

THE PLACE FOR BUSINESS

Downtown is the central hub for business in Vernal and will expand economic opportunities for all. It will retain and enhance existing businesses and be inviting for new businesses.



PLACE FOR BUSINESS

Goal 01:

Support local business parking needs with intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots and expanding options.

STRATEGIES:

- Add clear & consistent signage throughout downtown to public parking locations.
- Develop assistance program to improve parking conditions & access from rear lots to Main Street.
- Develop additional free public parking for large vehicles such as RVs.
- Expand parking opportunities along side streets.

Goal 02:

Support enhancement and modernization of existing business storefronts, facilities, and infrastructure.

STRATEGIES:

- Develop a facility improvement program to support facades and infrastructure needs.
- Expand small business support services.
- Encourage a combination of a virtual and physical presence for retail businesses.

Goal 03:

Encourage new business ventures in vacant storefronts and empty parcels to create a thriving district.

STRATEGIES:

- Encourage temporary uses of vacant lots and storefronts facing Main Street.
- Create incentive program to support small business startup ventures.
- Focus redevelopment efforts on underutilized/ vacant lots along Main Street.



LEGEND

goal one:
opportunities for improving parking lots



existing parking lots

goal two:
main street missing some teeth



vacant storefronts & lots



PLACE FOR BUSINESS

GOAL	STRATEGY	PROJECT	PROGRAM	FUNDING/ POLICY
Parking lot space is not an issue - lots are poorly signed, accessed, and in rough shape	Add consistent signage throughout downtown to public parking stations	Parking Study/ Create New Signage	Signage Program	Special Assessment Area
	Assist in improving parking lot surfaces	Redevelop Parking Lots and Downtown Parking Study	Key Area Redevelopment	
	Ensure there is enough space for large vehicle parking (RV, Trailers, etc)	Identify, with signage, large vehicle parking locations	Signage Program	
Main Street is a smile, missing some teeth	Encourage temporary uses or screening of vacant lots facing Main Street	Food Trucks		A mix of improved zoning and Community Reinvestment Area (CRA) Funds
	Focus Redevelopment efforts on underutilized / vacant lots along Main St	Interior & Exterior Improvements	Façade Improvement Program	
		Residences above businesses	CRA Housing Incentives	
			Sandwich Board Program	
	Address vacant storefronts	Business Start-up Programs	Revolving Loan Program	
		Nightlife Incentives		
Support existing businesses	Create a small business owner hub - and provide classes and support	Online Business Presence	Blade Signs	
		Sign Regulation for Downtown		

ACTIVE & CONNECTED

Downtown Vernal supports an active lifestyle through its streets, outdoor spaces, events, and recreation opportunities.



ACTIVE & CONNECTED

Goal 01:

Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking & biking.

STRATEGIES:

- Provide thematic active transportation signage with directions & distance to key destinations.
- Incorporate landscape and buffer amenities between sidewalks and parking where feasible.
- Promote designation & striping of bike lanes in downtown including 100 North & 100 South.
- Provide bicycle racks, shaded seating and similar amenities to improve the experience.
- Implement recommended active transportation projects from Uintah County Trails Master Plan.

Goal 02:

Support outdoor recreation & activities in downtown.

STRATEGIES:

- Construct a multi-sport court within an existing or new park in downtown.
- Actively recruit and support existing outdoor recreation-oriented businesses in downtown.
- Develop an open streets program as a standalone event or in support of other events.

Goal 03:

Create an inviting transition between the downtown commercial district and nearby residential areas.

STRATEGIES:

- Encourage low-scale, mixed-use development with people-oriented development forms.
- Enhance connectivity to Conference Center and other destinations adjacent to Downtown Core with signage and infrastructure improvements.
- Improve rear facades to buildings to visually enhance the walking experience to downtown.
- Provide clearly marked & well-lit pathways connecting parking lots & Main Street.



LEGEND

goal one:
create outdoor
recreational opportunities



open space for potential active
sports courts, such as pickleball

goal two:
prioritize pedestrian safety



streets with opportunities for
improvement (bicycle lanes,
buffer etc.)

goal three:
improving connectivity and
transitions



opportunities for
informative /
wayfinding signage

rear & side facade
improvements

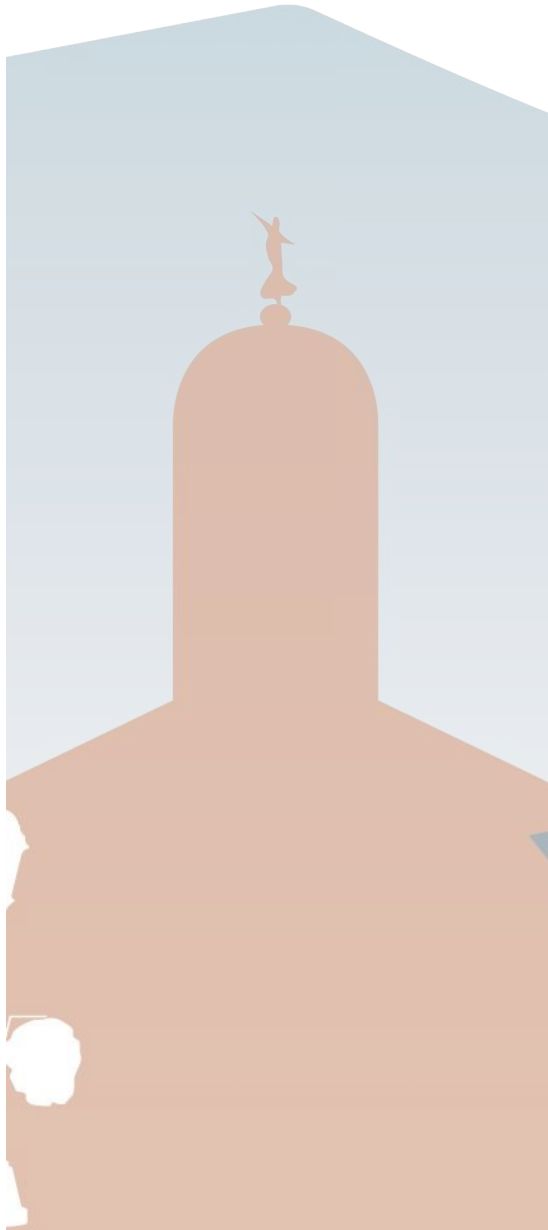


ACTIVE & CONNECTED

GOAL	STRATEGY	PROJECT	PROGRAM	FUNDING/ POLICY
Create opportunities for outdoor recreation	<i>Incorporate Pickleball Courts and skate park within an existing or new park near downtown</i>	Develop New Pickleball Courts	Key Area Redevelopment	A Mix of County, City, Private and RMP Grant Funds
Prioritize pedestrian safety throughout downtown - for walking & biking	<i>Add, clearly marked & lit, pathways connecting parking lots & Main Street</i>	Repave Areas Between Buildings	Key Area Redevelopment	Rural Economic Grants and City Funds
	<i>Incorporate a landscape buffer between sidewalks and parking on Main Street, where available</i>	Explore The Use of Green Bike Path Points		
	<i>Promote designation & striping of 100 North & 100 South bike lanes</i>	Create New Signage	Signage Program	Special Assessment Area, Revitalization Funds
	<i>Add active transportation signage with directions & distance to key destinations</i>			
Easing the transition and improving walkability between commercial & residential area, such as connecting the Convention Center to Main Street	<i>Enhance connectivity to Conference Center, and other destinations</i>	Rotating Shuttle Service		
	<i>Improve wayfinding throughout downtown - including signage to free parking</i>	Parking Study/ Create New Signage	Signage Program	Special Assessment Area
		Standardized Signs		
	<i>Improve rear facades to buildings to visually enhance the walking experience downtown</i>	Encourage Property Owners to Engage	Façade Improvement Program	CRA Incentives
	<i>Implement recommended active transportation projects from Uintah County Trails Master Plan</i>	Street Improvements to Accommodate Plan		During City Street Upgrades, Incorporate Improvement Recommendations



3. VERNAL'S VOICE



VERNAL'S VOICE

The public engagement component of this project was a crucial way to ensure the recommendations made within these pages are in accordance with the desires of Vernal's community. Through countless conversations, online comments, emails, and written notes, the overall vision of what citizens desire for their downtown has come into greater focus.

From improved building facades to honoring Vernal's history, the following pages document major take-aways from each type of public engagement. For all public comments, a Public Engagement Memorandum may be found in Appendix B. This provides a full list of comments made on Facebook, the Online Survey, and the dozens of sticky notes left on boards during the Design Workshop and River Fest.

This project aimed to capture the greatest number of different voices as possible. The Vernal Downtown Plan is a living document that will evolve and change alongside Vernal's downtown. The hope is that as change begins to occur, more community members will offer their vision for the downtown, guiding the design and implementation of this plan along the way.

ACCESS
PATH
BUSINESS RETENTION
ECONOMIC IMPACT TO
WALKABLE DOWN
ACCESSIBILITY FOR
PLACEMENT
TRADITION & AMENITIES
PARKS & PLAZAS
DEVELOPMENT COST
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

01

GATHER INITIAL IDEAS / LISTEN

(survey, social media, steering committee meetings)

02

EXPLORE VIA IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWS

03

REFINE VIA COMMUNITY & STAKEHOLDER INPUT

(stakeholder meetings, design charrette, community events)

04

CONFIRM VISION, GUIDING PRINCIPLES & GOALS

Public Engagement Process

VERNAL PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT PROCESS

The Vernal Downtown Plan was designed to include many touch points with the public, articulated in the diagram on the previous page. To reach the greatest number of citizens, the plan included both in-person and remote methods of engagement. The steering and planning committees conducted in-person and remote methods of engagement to encourage a range of ages and demographic groups to participate. Public engagement projects employed for this Vernal Downtown Plan are outlined in the following pages with the major take-aways from each.

ONLINE SURVEY

Beginning in March, Vernal citizens were invited to participate in an online survey comprised of 37 questions related to Downtown Vernal via Facebook and emails. Over 900 people participated, leaving hundreds of comments.

INTERVIEWS

Working with Vernal City, MHTN interviewed several individuals from the community. Below is a list of completed interviews and their comments to seven questions asked

during a the 30 minute exchange.

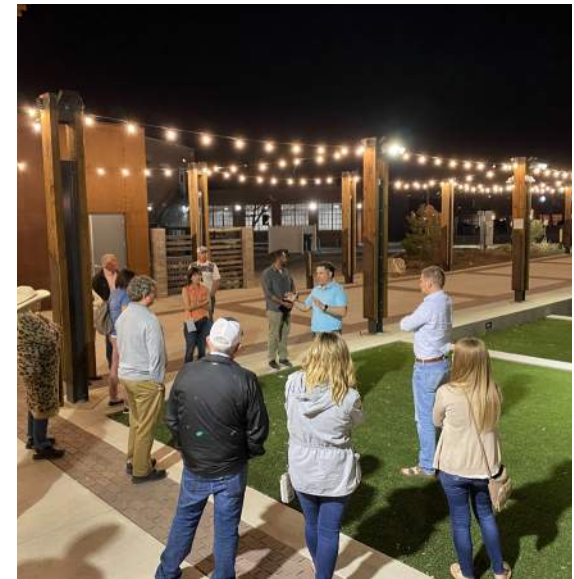
A total of seventeen interviews resulting in nine hours of discussion occurred with the Uintah County Economic Development Director, Uintah County Tourism Director, Downtown Revitalization Chair, Sunrise Engineering PM, City Manager, County Commissioner, UDOT Planner, Vernal Area Chamber of Commerce E.D., City Mayor, City Council Members, Business Owners, and Uintah County Library Director.

FACEBOOK

Vernal City provided several opportunities for citizens to receive prizes if they participated in both sharing the post and providing feedback to #DowntownVernal. Posts related to the Vernal Downtown Plan received 130 comments and 73 shares.

"I WISH THIS WAS..." STICKERS

Stacks of stickers were left at several businesses along Main Street, along with a comment box for participants to drop their comments into. These stickers read "I wish this was..." and encouraged community members to complete the phrase with what they felt downtown was missing in these spots. These comment boxes were periodically emptied and the comment stickers inside were displayed in store windows for passerbys to read.



Tour at David Street Station in Casper, WY



Workshop Day 2, May 5, 2021

STEERING COMMITTEE MEETINGS

As a means of quality assurance and control, a Steering Committee comprising community members, elected officials, and the core team from MHTN met regularly through the plan creation process to review progress, offer feedback on proposed plan content, and address public comments.

CITY COUNCIL MEETING

Consistent touch points with the City and County allowed the core team to vet ideas, gain valuable insight and refine messaging and concept designs based on input received.

SITE VISITS

To gain a better understanding of what other comparable cities are doing in their downtown, Vernal City employees, the project's engineer, business owners, Vernal's City Mayor, City Council members, community members, and the design team visited Steamboat Springs, CO, and Casper, WY, in early May 2021.

The group observed street layout and design, lighting options, sidewalk treatments, parking, street amenities, signage, and public space. They were particularly interested to see David Street Station in Casper as an example of a successful public space.

Casper's Downtown Development Authority Director, Kevin Hawley, shared the plaza's operations, programming, phasing, financing, ongoing costs, management and maintenance, and general take-aways from the City's perspective on the public space's success. He also shared additional revitalization efforts in the downtown in terms of building and street improvements.

DESIGN WORKSHOP

Vernal citizens were invited to participate in a two-day design workshop in May 2021. Several boards were displayed around the conference room that presented a background to the project, the transportation study, market analysis, site visits to Casper, WY, and Steamboat Springs, CO, and a SWOT analysis (or "Strength, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats" analysis) of the downtown. Participants were asked to provide feedback on what they perceive as downtown's strengths and weaknesses, as well as offer what they see as possible improvements.

These were captured during different activities during the workshop, on sticky notes left on boards, during informal discussions between groups, and on trace paper as design concepts.

DOWNTOWN WALKING TOUR

During the two-day Design Workshop, a group of about 20 people led by Vernal City Manager, Quinn Bennion, walked Downtown Vernal. The event took roughly two hours and included several stops at local businesses to meet business owners.

JOHN WESLEY POWELL RIVER FESTIVAL 2021

City Staff and the Design Team occupied a table at Vernal's River Fest with boards updating the public on the downtown's block design. Close to 50 people stopped by to share their thoughts, many of whom were aware of the project. As the last in-person public event of this public engagement process, it was an important opportunity to learn how the block design was being received and make necessary changes before the Draft Vernal Downtown Plan became publicly available.

HELLO

I WISH THIS WAS...

Purpose: Learn from residents what they want from vacant buildings within the downtown.

Timeline: Ongoing

Comments Left:

- An art gallery and sit-down coffee
- Bed, Bath, and Beyond
- Buzz in Creamery
- Public Restroom
- Texas Roadhouse
- Olive Garden
- Barnes & Noble
- Chick-fil-A or Carl's Jr
- Roller Skating
- A bookstore or a record store
- Chick-fil-A
- Trampoline Park
- Old Kmart building into a fun center 17 and younger or planet fitness
- Go Carts!!

- Skatepark or trampoline park
- Greek restaurant-gyros and micro-brewery
- A public restroom for out-of-town visitors
- Sizzler
- I want laser tag back
- A new gaming center for kids and adults
- Target
- Condo community

I WISH THIS WAS



www.bit.ly/VernalDowntown





ONLINE SURVEY

Purpose: Understand what community members perceive as Vernal's opportunities, constraints and overall vision for a re-conceived downtown.

Timeline: March 2021-May 2021

Major Takeaways:

DEMOGRAPHICS

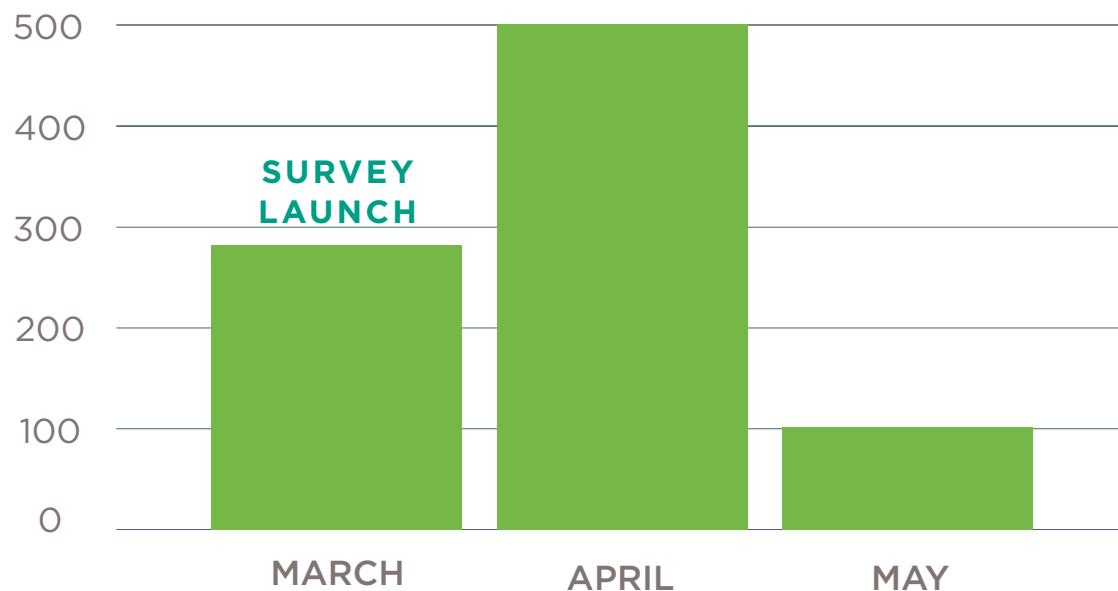
- Over half of the participants were between the ages of 25 and 44.
- Half of the participants have lived in the Vernal area for 20+ yrs.

DOWNTOWN AMENITIES AND APPEARANCE

- The three most common words to describe Vernal is: Dated, Pretty and Potential.
- The two ideas shared most when asked what makes Vernal unique were: The beautiful flowers, summers, and the historic buildings.
- Challenges identified were lack of parking, ease and safety of walking, number of businesses and restaurant selection. *(Continued on the next page)*

903

responses collected



- Most participants disagreed when asked whether they see Downtown Vernal as a destination.
- Downtown's potential to become a vibrant community has an average rating is 4.0 Stars.
- Overall building condition 2.3 Stars.
- The retail environment is 1.9 Stars.
- Availability of housing is 2.0 stars.
- Cultural facilities and attractions is 2.6 Stars.
- General appearance is 2.9 Stars.
- Restaurants and entertainment options is 2.6 Stars.
- Historic ambiance of the downtown is 3.1 Stars.
- Wayfinding and Signage is 2.8 Stars.
- Parks and Open Space is 3.0 Stars.
- Attraction to downtown for customers outside of Vernal is 2.4 Stars.

COMMON REASONS TO VISIT DOWNTOWN VERNAL

- Cobble Rock Park, eating, and the library are the three most common words used to describe how folks spend their time in Downtown Vernal.
- Over 40% of participants eat in downtown restaurants a few times a month.
- Roughly 30% shop in the downtown a few times a year.

- Roughly 40% visit the downtown for a family activity a few times a year.
- Roughly 60% visit the downtown for an event a few times a year.
- Business variety's average rating is 2.2 Stars.

DOWNTOWN CIRCULATION

- Downtown's traffic circulation has an average rating of 2.5 Stars.
- Bicycle mobility and access is 2.1 Stars.
- Parking availability is 2.0 Stars.
- Sidewalk and public space is 2.9 Stars.

DOWNTOWN'S FUTURE

- Prospect for future development is 3.8 stars.
- Property owner's/business' willingness to invest is 2.1 Stars.
- The top three short-term changes to the downtown to strengthen existing assets are: More locally owned businesses, add entertainment options, enhance building architecture and urban design.
- Over 40% have no preference on two or three story buildings. 38% prefer two-story buildings.
- Nearly 50% prefer no medians.
- 70% prefer mixed-use land use.



Photo of a two-story building provided in the online survey.



Photo of a three-story building provided in the survey.



Photo of mixed-use development provided in the survey.



INTERVIEWS

Purpose: Ask a range of people invested in Vernal's future six questions (listed below) to learn what their concerns and hopes are for the Downtown:

Timeline: March-April 2021

Questions Asked and Major Takeaways :

1. What do you think of Vernal's Downtown?

- PROS: Flowers are beautiful in the summer, events throughout the year, Vernal is a tight community, outdoor recreation is varied and abundant and the downtown has lots of potential.
- CONS: Downtown has a lack of business, wayfinding is difficult, there's a lack of parking and it's unattractive in winter,

2. What efforts do you know of that have aimed to improve it?

- Sign programs
- HAWK crosswalk
- The Innovation Hub

(Continued on the next page)

15 interviews
with

Property and Business Owners
County Commissioners
City Councilmembers
the Uintah County Library Director
Vernal City Mayor
Uintah County Economic Director
Vernal City Manager
Sunrise Engineering P.M.
Vernal Area Chamber of Commerce E.D.
Region 3 Planning Manager for UDOT

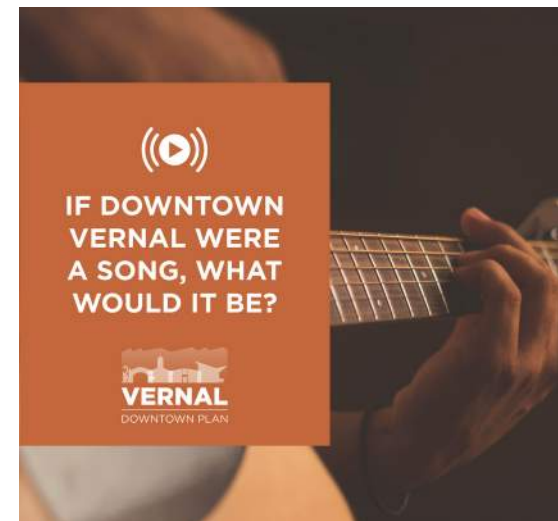
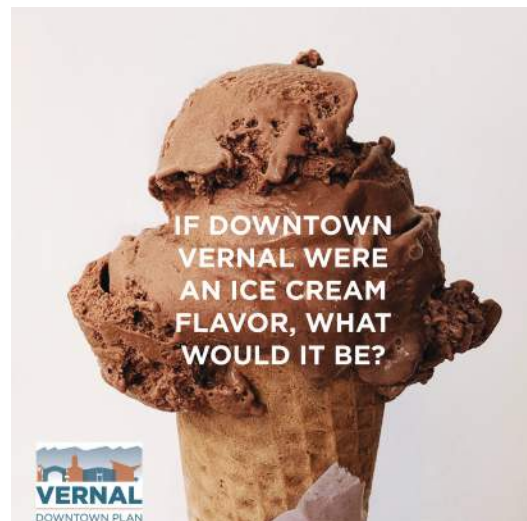


Purpose: Through the use of questions and prompts, in addition to prizes for participation, solicit feedback from Vernal's community on what they wish their downtown could be.

Timeline: Ongoing

Major Takeaways:

- Posts related to the Downtown Plan received 130 comments and 73 shares
- The question that asked participants to share their ideas about Downtown Vernal received the most participation with 92 comments, 45 shares and 69 likes.
- Answers were varied but related to reducing traffic, more shopping, entertainment, fitness/health, restaurant availability, more options for kids, more options of things to do in the evening.
- Many participants wished to bring historic Vernal companies back such as the drive-in movie theater.





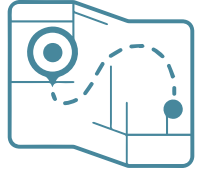
STEERING COMMITTEE + CITY/ COUNTY COUNCIL

Purpose: The Steering Committee was formed as a way to provide ongoing feedback and guidance on the plan at key touch points. Members voices were crucial in guiding how information was shared with local community members, business owners, and organizations like the Chamber of Commerce.

The City Council and County Commission were also kept continuously updated on the plan as it developed as a way to have their input guide the evolution of the design.

Timeline: Ongoing





SITE VISITS

Purpose: Vernal community members including local small business owners and present and past community government leaders traveled to Steamboat Springs, Colorado, and Casper, Wyoming, to observe successful examples of downtown and Main St. revitalization efforts.

Timeline: April 30-May 1, 2021

Major Takeaways:

The trip focused on Casper's David Street Station Project. Kevin Hawley, the Downtown Development Authority Executive Director of Casper, generously spent the two days answering questions concerning the development, phasing, funding and maintenance of the David Street Station project. He also provided insight to additional ongoing downtown initiatives that focus on improving walkability and economic vibrancy for the community.

CASPER, WY



STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO





WALKING TOUR

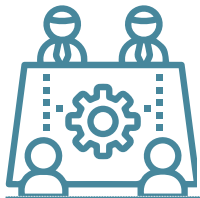
Purpose: This walking tour visited number of locations within Downtown Vernal as a way to understand different opportunities, constraints and perspectives from business owners.

Timeline: May 6, 2021

Major Takeaways:

- Discussions with business owners revealed their desire for better parking options for their patrons
- Some policies, such as requiring an engineer to review sign design, hinders small businesses
- Development in the downtown, such as the new bowling alley, holds great potential to add vibrancy to downtown
- Some sidewalks are not ADA accessible due to flower pots
- Mural program a success - building on this is desired for the downtown
- Mid-block areas seen as holding great potential





DESIGN WORKSHOP

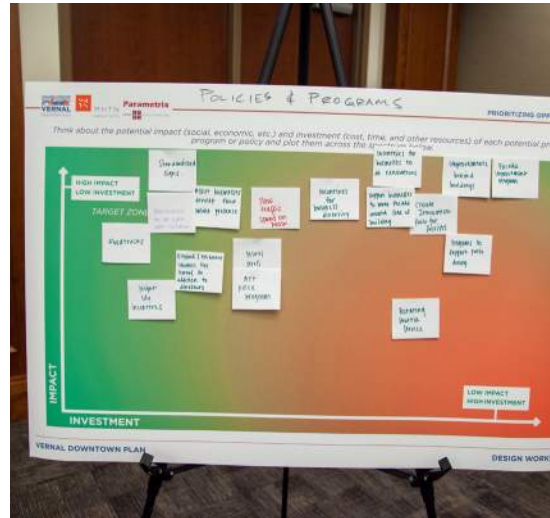
Purpose: Community members were invited to participate in a two-day design workshop where several boards were displayed around the conference room that presented a background to the project, the transportation study, market analysis, site visits to Casper, WY, and Steamboat Springs, CO, and a SWOT analysis of the downtown.

Timeline: May 5-6, 2021

Major Takeaways:

CHALLENGES

- Residential needed above shops.
- Some areas need investment and care
- Tourists vs. residents can have different needs, wants/desires
- The flower pots are outdated and, most of the time, in the way of parallel parking and pedestrians.
- A lot of infrastructure and surrounding buildings need to be updated to match uniqueness of Vernal



- Building owners should be accountable for keeping up their building
- Industrial traffic detracts from tourism. Consider options for alternative paths
- Main Street has a smell that is not attractive
- Sidewalks seem narrow. Unable to see business signs when driving because of visual noise
- Big lot turn into multiple use area

OPPORTUNITIES

- Let's promote tourism!
- Parking improvements behind Zions Bank and signage to parking behind Cedar Bears and Sage Motel
- Community space downtown then branch out from there
- Improve parking potholes
- Need more nighttime activity for youth and adults
- Oil field and heritage art displays
- During events, drinking fountains would be nice at Cobble Rock Park and somewhere on the west side
- Downtown needs more varied businesses
- Provide tax incentive for business with two stories

PRIORITIZING OPPORTUNITIES

HIGH IMPACT/LOW INVESTMENT

- Enhanced connectivity to conference center
- Signage to parking
- Angled parking on side streets (such as 100 East)
- Places to sit
- Four entries: welcome signs/gateway signs
- Electric car charging station
- Slow traffic speed on Main St.
- Expand festivals to include winter activities
- Assist businesses develop their online presence
- Standardized signs
- Businesses to be open late - seasonal
- Mural stroll
- Expand/enhance themes for Vernal in addition to dinosaurs
- Food trucks

LOW IMPACT/HIGH INVESTMENT

- Parking Garage
- Pickle ball courts
- Pop-out planters (bulbouts) at intersections
- Consistency of streetscape experience
- Rotating shuttle service

HIGH IMPACT/HIGH INVESTMENT

- Identify location for public space to become a multi-use area
- Surface parking improvements
- Pedestrian walks connecting parking and Main St.
- Medians on Main and Vernal Avenue where applicable
- Boulevard atmosphere on Vernal Avenue south of Main St.
- Sense of arrival at Main St. and Vernal Avenue
- Destination gathering place
- Public restrooms (visitors' center)
- Better lighting
- Façade improvement program
- Improvements behind buildings
- Create innovation hub for artists
- Programs to support patio dining
- Small business advertising program
- Incentives for business diversity
- Incentives for residences above businesses

LOW IMPACT/LOW INVESTMENT

- Large clock on side of bank
- Large vehicle parking
- Art piece program
- Night life incentives
- Decorative prints on sidewalks directing people to destinations



Purpose: Provide an update of the Vernal Downtown Plan to Vernal's public and solicit feedback

Timeline: July 31, 2021

Major Takeaways:

- Over 50 people visited the booth and shared their thoughts in conversation and on sticky notes
- Suggestions for transportation and circulation included reverse angle parking, bike lanes and walking paths provided
- Desires for celebrating Vernal's history expressed
- Suggestions for community assets such as a drive-in, park, dog park, ice/roller skating ribbon, and in general, family oriented option provided
- Suggestions for events such as music festival, car shows, and downtown motorcycle ride also provided
- Recommendations made to improve the pedestrian experience with shade trees





EXISTING 4. CONDITIONS

EXISTING CONDITIONS

The Existing Conditions chapter explores the social and physical context surrounding Downtown Vernal. The opportunities and constraints outlined on the following pages guided the design concept and guidelines for this plan. Considering the social and economic factors, as well as Vernal's overall character, allows the plan to be site specific and sensitive to community needs.

Because Vernal's downtown is heavily influenced by traffic along Main St. and Vernal Ave., this chapter also provides an analysis of transportation within the downtown area. This includes a traffic count, crash hot spot heat map, and safety considerations.

A more thorough analysis of the existing conditions that influenced the design and planning efforts of this plan can be found in Appendix A Vernal Downtown Plan Project Foundations: Existing Conditions Report April 2021

DOWNTOWN ASSETS

The number and quality of events that happen in Downtown Vernal on an annual basis are by far and away one of the greatest assets to the area according to community members. The historic downtown buildings that envelope Main Street is a great asset.

Another major strength of the downtown is the abundance of beautiful flowers maintained by the City that line Main Street. Additional notable assets of the downtown include the historic Zions Bank, which is currently undergoing major renovation investments, Cobble Rock Park, and the growing mural program.

DOWNTOWN CHALLENGES/NEEDS

The most common challenge to a vibrant and thriving Downtown Vernal is the abundance of vacant store fronts on and around Main Street. Community members cite the development of the “Vernal Town Center” to the west of downtown as a major cause for why so many businesses have left or disappeared from downtown.

In addition these challenges posed to businesses, there is a strong perception that there is not enough parking in the downtown. While, a parking analysis showed there is an abundance of parking behind buildings, most of these lots are unorganized and need as much upgrading as the buildings. Furthermore, many people, especially tourists passing through, do not know these lots exist because there is no wayfinding signage or indication of them. Parking on Main Street can also be difficult because of how unsafe it can feel to get out of the car with high speed heavy truck traffic passing closely by.

Not only are the parking lots behind buildings in poor condition, but the backs of buildings, which do have entrances to many stores on Main Street, are often unattractive and could use some upkeep as well.

Another major challenge to creating an inviting walkable environment on Main Street is that truck traffic passing through creates lots of noise.

Finally, some community members and business owners are skeptical of planning and spending money on significant improvements because of past unsuccessful efforts.

DOWNTOWN OPPORTUNITIES

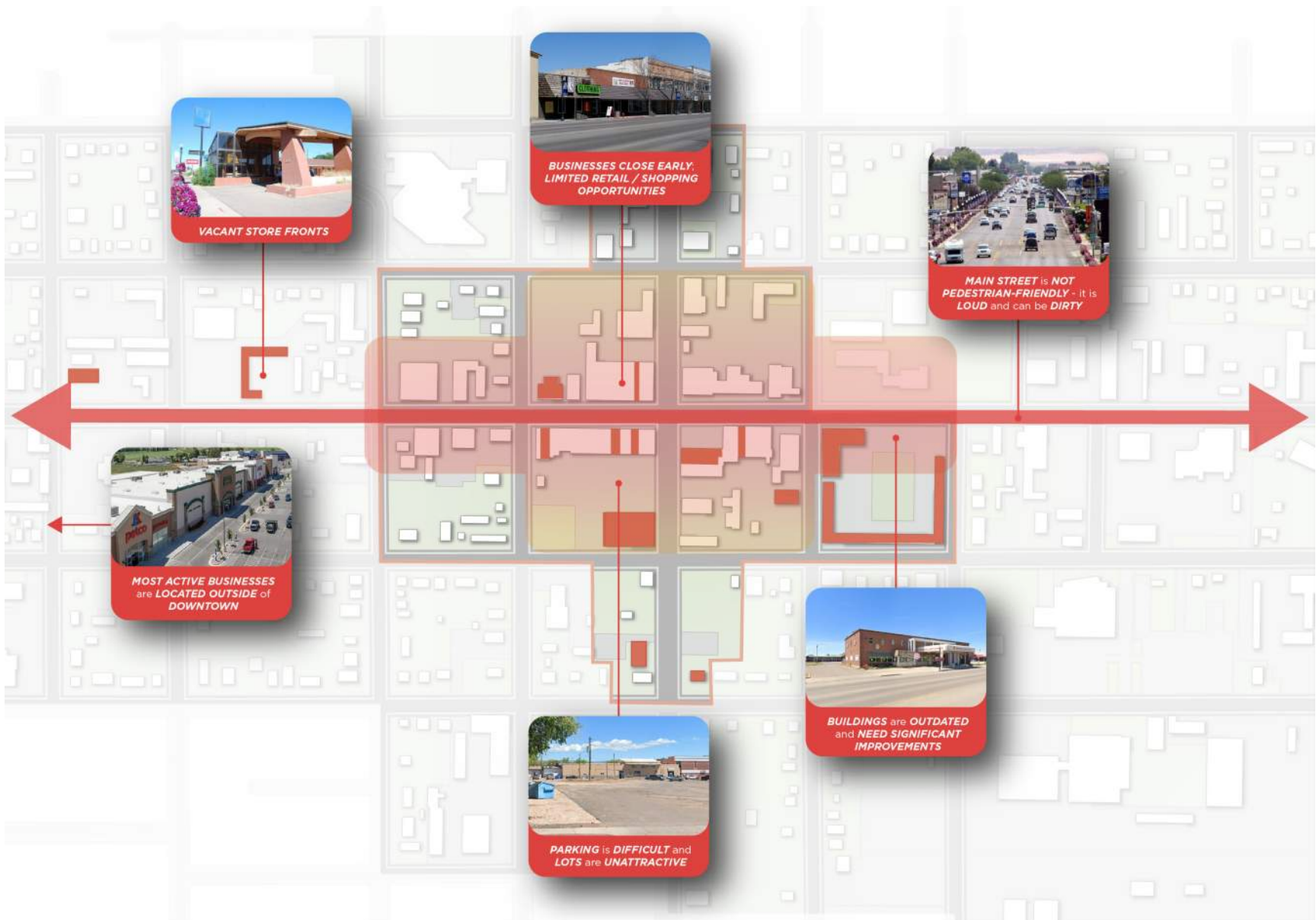
The map on the next page illustrates just some of the ideas for revitalization in the downtown. One of the most popular ideas expressed has been to create a large public gathering space in downtown.

Several physical improvements could also enhance the appearance and experience of downtown visitors. This includes improving business facades on Main Street and updating parking lots with robust signage behind buildings. Some of these infrastructure and maintenance opportunities boost the likelihood that businesses will choose to stay, expand, or be attracted to locating in the downtown.

Creating a more attractive environment on the street could include adding public art that can be interactive, engaging, and thematically tied to Vernal's heritage and identity. Opportunities for outdoor dining or places for people to linger on side streets and develop mid-block pedestrian realms where traffic is slower and lighter, as well as gateways and wayfinding signage creates a distinct presence of the downtown as a destination.



Downtown Vernal Assets Map



Downtown Vernal Challenges and Needs Map



Downtown Vernal Opportunities Key Locations

GEOGRAPHIC CONTEXT

Many natural and recreational attractions are located within a short distance of Vernal, UT. These outdoor destinations cater to people with a wide variety of interests. There are opportunities for camping in Ashley National Forest, Red Fleet State Park, and more. For those interested in off-road vehicle courses and trails, Red Mountain and Cliff Ridge are within thirty minutes of Vernal. Lapoint BLM land and McCoy Flats provide exciting terrain for mountain bikers. Still more opportunities exist for fishing and rafting along the Green River and in Steinaker State park. See the next page for a map that shows recreation opportunities in the regional vicinity of Vernal's downtown.



Ashley National Forest



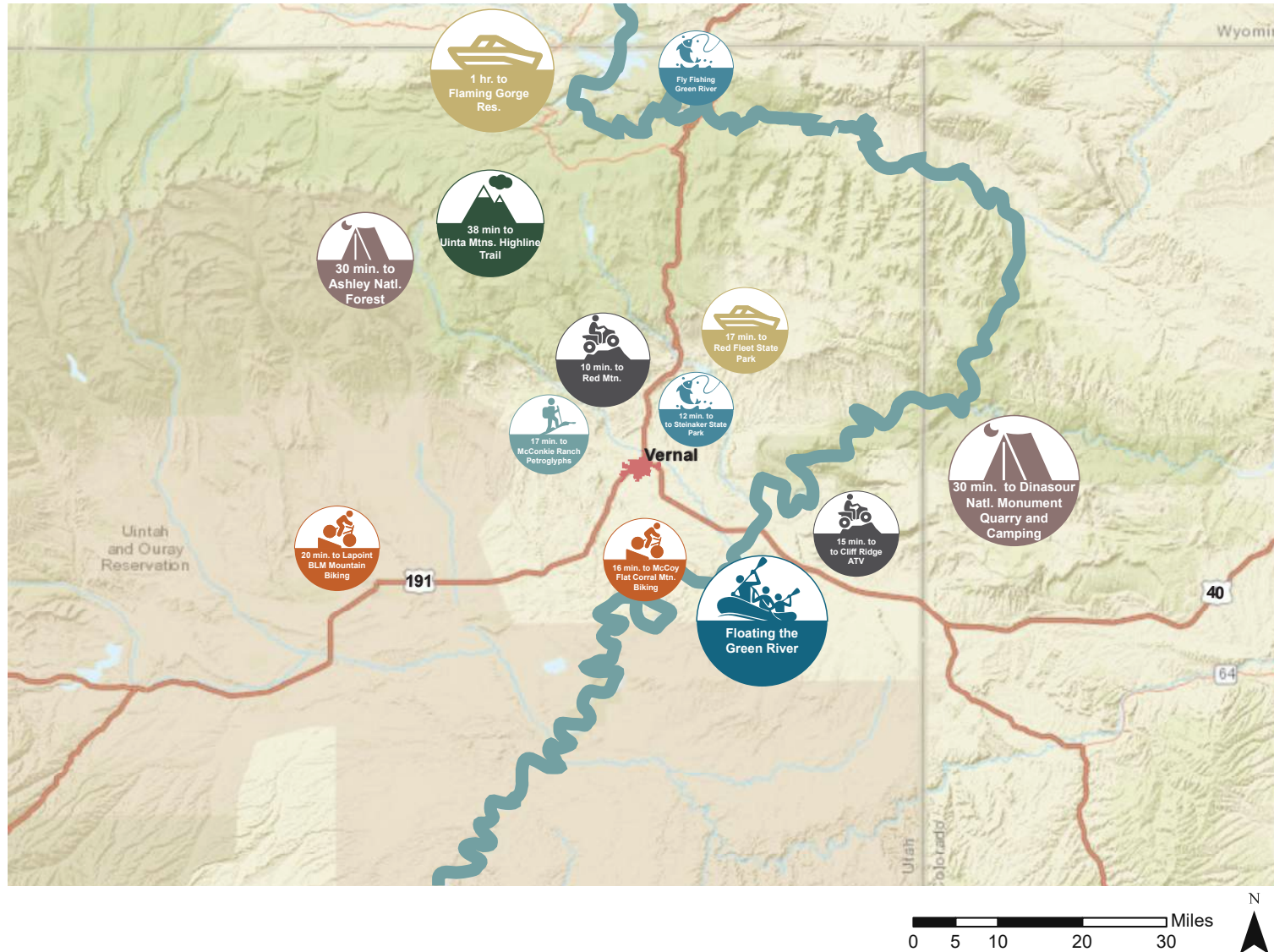
Dinosaur National Monument



Flaming Gorge National Rec Area



Green River



Recreation Opportunities

- Raft
- Motor Boat
- Camp
- ATV
- Fish
- Alpine Adventures
- Mountain Bike
- Hike

Regional Context Map

DOWNTOWN CHARACTERISTICS

When asked to describe Downtown Vernal in three words, there was a stark contrast in how community members felt about it. Words ranged from beautiful to quaint to historic on the positive side. Words also ranged from outdated to empty to boring on the negative side. Some of the most positive comments revolved around the flowers in the downtown. And despite people feeling like the downtown is not living up to it's potential, people are hopeful and optimistic that downtown can improve.

ZONING, LAND USE, & COMMERCIAL USES

Downtown Vernal is primarily comprised of two zones: Central Commercial and Heavy Commercial. The Central Commercial zone's purpose is to provide for the sale and supply of a range of retail, wholesale goods, and personal services for the region, and also a center for entertainment and cultural activities.

The land use map shows that the majority of businesses on Main Street and Vernal Ave are commercial (red). However, there is also some office space and several vacancies in this area. There are also some single family

and multifamily residences on the periphery of the study area. When commercial land uses are broken down, retail (purple) and dining (pink) are the majority of uses in the downtown. There are two motels, one of which (the Lamplighter) is vacant. There are also a handful of fitness studios, which occupy the large footprints of some of the downtown business space. There are also some auto-oriented businesses occupying key corner locations in the area.

HISTORIC CHARACTER AND ARCHITECTURE

Wide sidewalks, quaint storefronts of brick and glass, covered by deep overhangs characterize the core of Downtown Vernal on Main Street. These characteristics invite a welcoming window shopping experience as one walks along Main Street.

Downtown Vernal's building character is defined by historic buildings dating back to the 1940's and earlier, intermingled with buildings built throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s with relatively few buildings built within the last few decades.

A handful of notable buildings contribute significantly to the historic character of Downtown Vernal, include Zions Bank (known as the Parcel Post Bank circa 1920) and the aforementioned Lamplighter Inn (originally built in 1947 as Hotel Vernal).



Vernal Theatre Façade

Newer City and County facilities are of high quality and are distributed throughout the downtown area. However in many cases these new facilities take a modern approach to site planning, with significant surface parking surrounding the facility rather than reinforcing the row-style development typical of the rest of the Main Street environment.

COMFORT

Vernal's downtown has many features already in place that contribute to the overall sense of comfort. Street trees, crosswalks, and pedestrian lights contribute to thermal comfort (offered by shade) and perception of safety (offered by adequate lighting and safe street crossings).

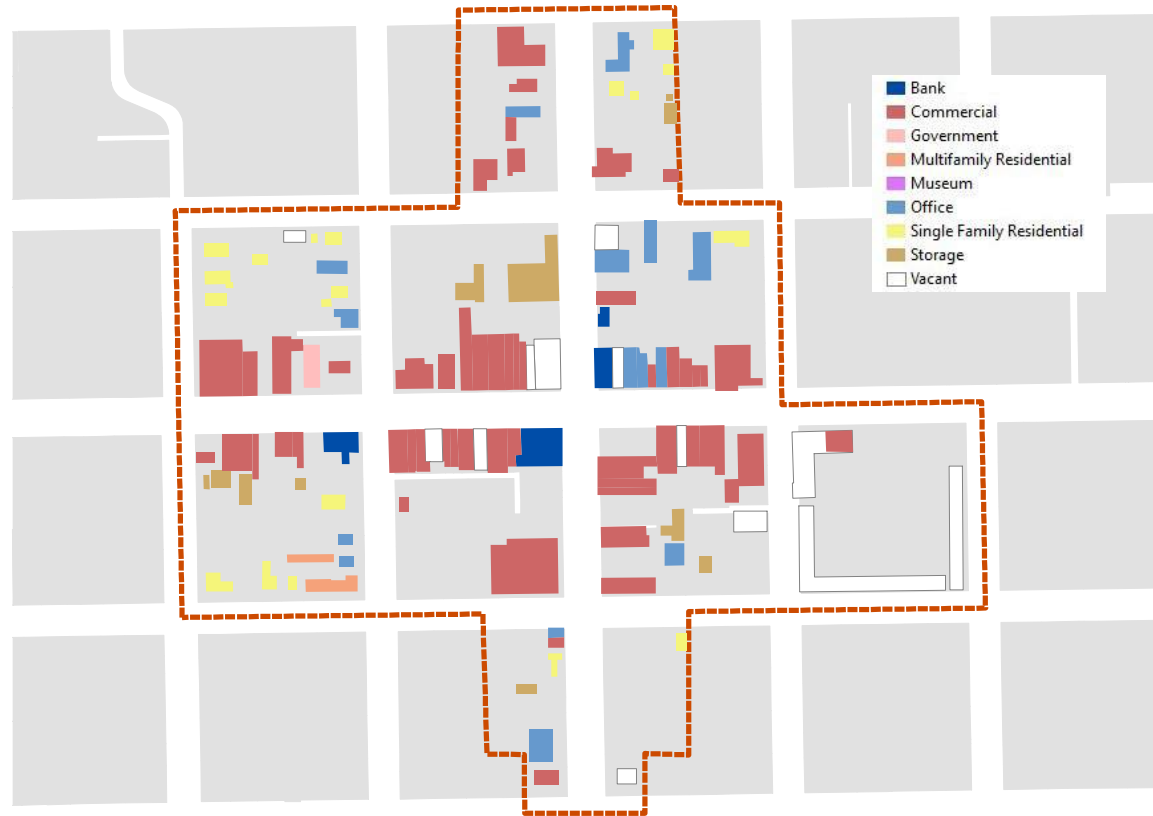


Shade Trees along Main Street

Attributes that diminish a person's perception of comfort can be found in the noise created by passing trucks along Main Street. Inconsistent styles of street amenities, vacant buildings, and lack of color during winter months diminish the perception of beauty. Inconsistent paving that has in places been cut to minimize tripping hazards diminishes pedestrians' ability to comfortably navigate the sidewalks.



Large Trucks Along Main St. Contribute to Noise Pollution



Downtown Vernal Zoning Map & Uses (July 2021)

MARKET

Market data analysis is critical to both the history and future of Vernal. Within this section, we examine some key metrics that help define attractions and benefits to living in the area, as well as potential concerns that may restrict growth or limit quality of life advancements. For this analysis, we compare Vernal to other cities within the Intermountain Region that offer similar characteristics, including potential tourism draws, transportation connections, proximity to major urban areas, and job/housing relationships. It is important to analyze how these data points have shaped the history and current makeup of Vernal. These can provide insight into what needs to be changed in order to fulfill a vision for the larger city, as well as the more focused downtown study area.

PARCEL VALUES

Downtown Vernal also represents a wide variety in property values, commensurate with the age and use differences highlighted in previous maps. The map to the right indicates assessed values per acre. Concentrations of higher values are noted in select areas of town, particularly in areas closest to Main Street.

DEMOGRAPHICS

Vernal, in relation to other cities of notable comparison, shows a low-to-moderate proposed growth rate. This is largely due to a lack of available land, low proposed employment growth, and a perceived population that is aging. Projected economic growth between 2020 and 2040 is forecast by the State of Utah for Vernal at 0.60% per year, well below the 1.2 percent annual forecast for Moab or 2.5 percent growth projected for Kanab (which is the highest in the set of comparable cities). It is, however, above the anticipated growth rates for Casper (.18), Sheridan (.58), Helper (.24), and Page, Arizona (.40). A growing populace will be a key consideration in economic development growth for the city, as employers, retailers, developers, etc., will all look to this data point to provide assurances of continued, growing future demand. Growth rates within Vernal City limits will be limited, but surrounding areas are expected to grow at a higher rate than previously anticipated.

Vernal reflects a median household income of slightly more than \$48,000 per year. Compared to the other cities chosen in this analysis for comparison, Vernal is shown at the lower end of the range. This metric should be closely considered when evaluating potential retail options and development feasibility.

Vernal shows employment considerations that are not entirely unlike some of the comparison cities, although it's percentage of employees that live and work in the city proper is on the lower end of the data set range. Overall, approximately 25 percent of Vernal employees live and work in the area, while the remainder 75 percent of area employees commute into the city on a daily basis. Nearly all of the competitive cities reflect a rate above 25 percent for the percentage of employees that live and work in the city.

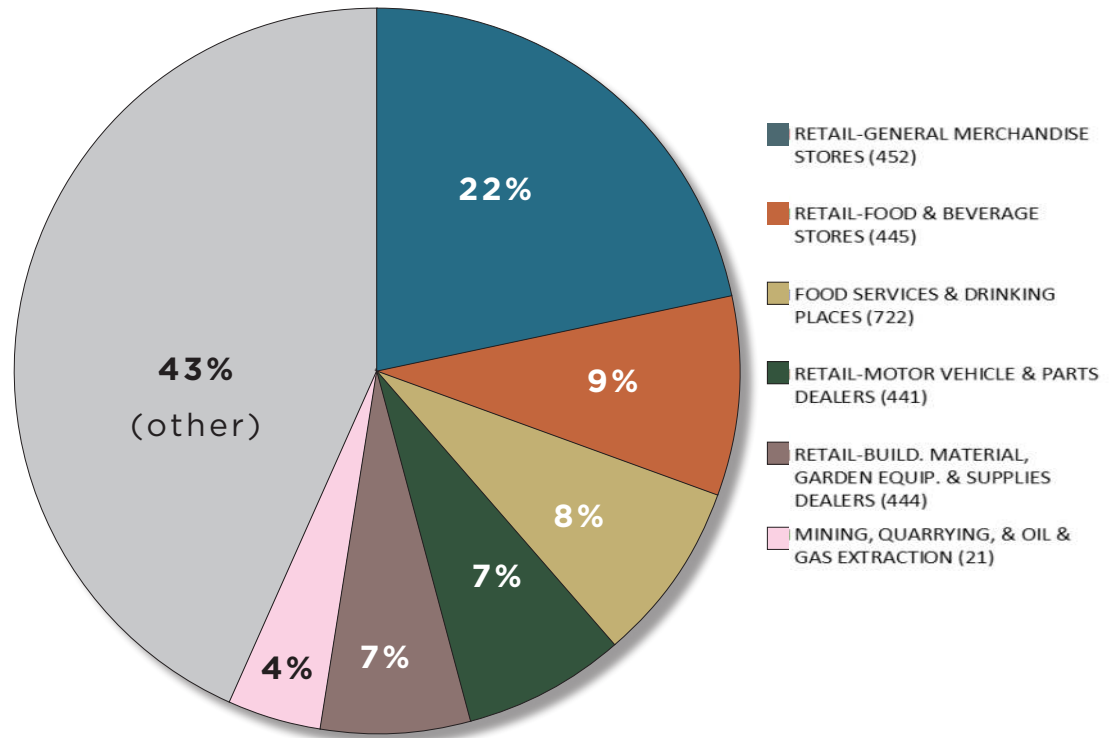
These data sets can inform job creation and policy in a city. For Vernal, future land use decisions for employment should be weighed with an understanding of the impact of employees coming into the area and how that impacts traffic, housing, and retail spending patterns.

TAX REVENUE

Vernal reflects desirable taxable sales per capita statistics, particularly considering its fairly low median household income levels. This suggests strong tourism demand and/or the city's ability to draw shoppers from neighboring communities. Overall, the most recent 12-month reporting period showed taxable sales of \$46,178 per capita, well above statewide averages (closer to \$20,000 per capita, and notably higher than all comparison cities except for Moab).

The following graph shows the categories that account for Vernal's retail sales. Besides the "other" category (a combination of several smaller categories), sales appear to be healthy on a per capita basis for "retail-general merchandise" and "retail food and beverage stores." Vernal does appear to have room for growth in the "hotel" category, as nearly all of the competitive cities show higher collectible sales taxes from hotels than does Vernal.

*Information unavailable



Vernal Tax Revenue Source

CULTURE

For a downtown to be successful, it has to have something for everyone. Tourists want to visit authentic, local places. Downtown Vernal should embody Vernal City and the Uintah Basin's people and culture on whole. As with most communities, the reasons for people locating to a region often center on its geographic position or geographic advantages. Vernal is certainly no exception to this; the mineral-rich natural resources have precipitated an active industry in oil and gas in the past century, despite lacking access to heavy rail. This industry has drawn laborers to it that are often skilled and hard working during “boom” times.

Simultaneously, people have been drawn to the region for its access to outdoor recreational resources including Dinosaur National Monument, Flaming Gorge National Recreation Area, Steinaker Reservoir, and Ashley National Forest, and its affordable cost of living.

The Utes have a tribal membership of 2,970 and over half of its membership lives on the Uintah and Ouray Reservation outside of Vernal.

They operate their own tribal government and oversee approximately 1.3 million acres of trust land. The Utes also operate several businesses as well as Cattle raising and mining of oil and natural gas is big business on the reservation.



Alive After Five Event

Both Uintah Basin Technical College (the first technical college in the state) and Utah State University Vernal Campus are located across the street from Uintah High School and produce a skilled workforce supply to the area.

If downtown can be a place where everyone from Vernal wants to be and feels welcome, this will create activity and liveliness on its streets.

EVENTS

The City works closely with the County Tourism office to host many county-wide events in and around downtown. When asked what makes Downtown Vernal great, many people said the events that happen in downtown, whether that be the Dinah “Soar” Days, Holly Days, or other events that are growing in numbers.

TRANSPORTATION

As part of setting a solid foundation for future planning efforts, the existing conditions of transportation networks within Vernal's downtown were examined and analyzed.

ROADWAY

Downtown Vernal is bisected by two main streets, the east-west running Main Street, or US-40, and the north-south running Vernal Avenue, or US 191. Both Highways 191 and 40 serve as primary connections to Roosevelt and Duchesne to the West, Manila to the North, and Dinosaur, CO, to the East (see map on this page).

TRANSIT

Despite its rural nature, Vernal is currently served by two transit lines operated by the Basin Transit Association (BTA). The Green, or Vernal to Roosevelt Route runs from the Uintah Community Center in Vernal to a loop in Roosevelt, and has several stations in Downtown Vernal. The Red BTA route has 28 stops throughout this Vernal Loop.

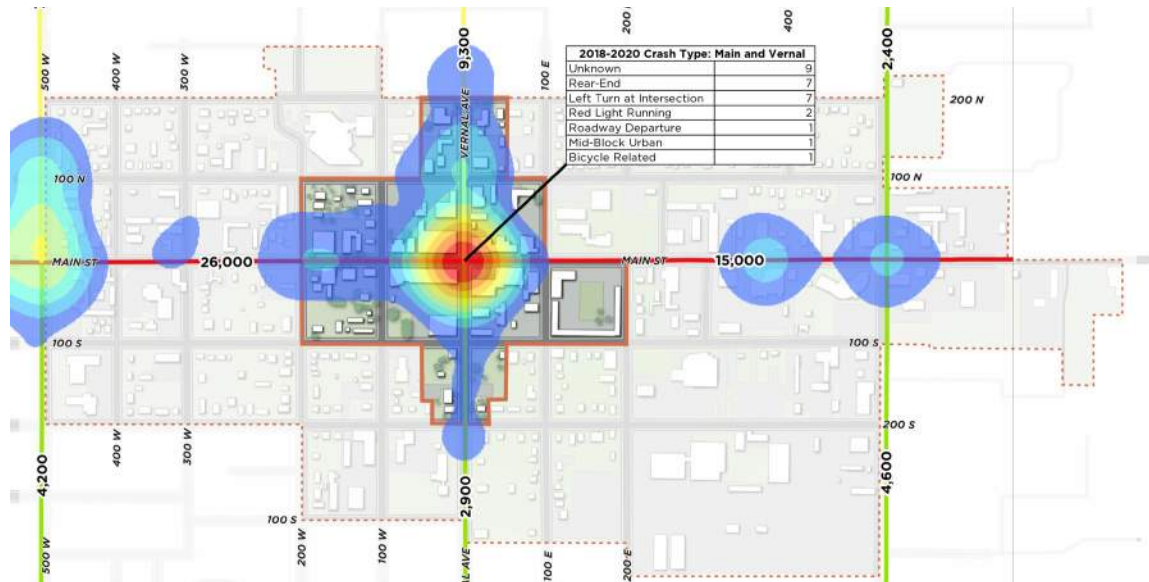
PEDESTRIAN

The Downtown Vernal study area is generally well connected by sidewalks, but some gaps and areas with maintenance concerns exist.

Crosswalks are present at all signalized intersections in the study area, and while some non-signalized intersections contain crosswalks, a majority contain no crosswalks. A High-Intensity Activated Crosswalk (HAWK) signal with a crosswalk across Main Street is located at 200 East.

SHARED MOBILITY

Shared mobility services arrived in Utah about three years ago. In March of 2021, the first e-scooters arrived in Vernal. Twenty-five scooters are currently operational within a geofence from 1500 East to 2500 West and 500 North to 1500 South.



Traffic Volume and Crash Hotspots

BIKE

Downtown Vernal currently includes no formal bike lanes. The 2018 Uintah County Trails Master Plan identifies multiple future bike routes through the city, and the 2020 Vernal City General Plan contains conceptual renderings of preferred complete streets solutions on streets in Downtown Vernal.

TRAFFIC VOLUMES AND SAFETY

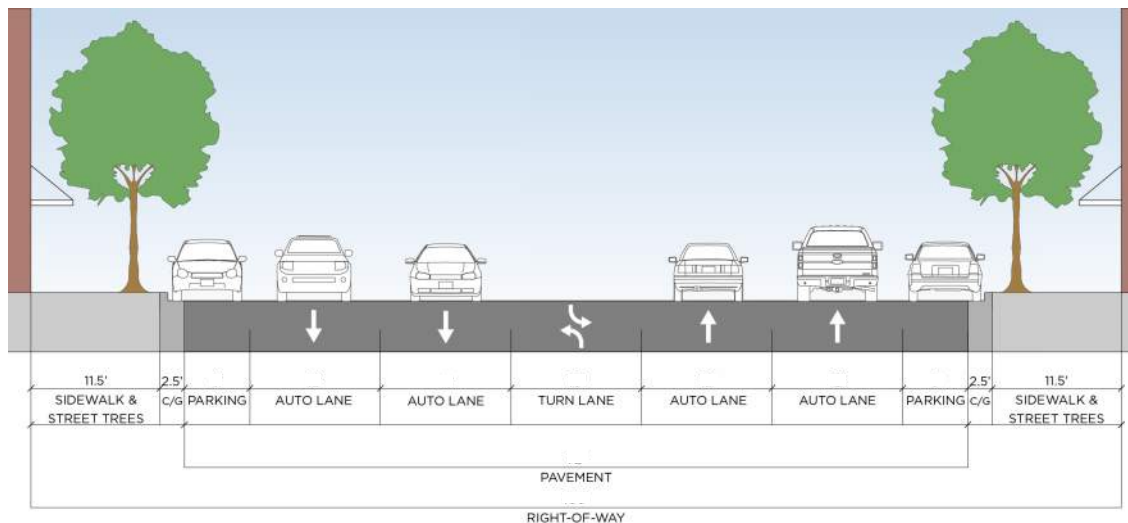
The busiest segments of road in Downtown Vernal are Main Street west of Vernal Avenue with 26,000 average annual daily trips (Annual Average Daily Traffic [AADT]; Source: 2019 UDOT AADT Data), followed by Main Street east of Vernal Avenue with 15,000 AADT, and Vernal Avenue north of Main Street with 9,300 daily trips (see map on this page). The highest volume of crashes in Downtown Vernal from 2018-2020 occurred within 250 feet of the intersection at Main Street and Vernal Avenue as depicted on the map.

CROSS-SECTIONS

Existing typical cross sections for Main

Street, Vernal Avenue north of Main Street, and Vernal Avenue south of Main Street can be found in the figures below and on the next page. All three cross-sections located in Downtown Vernal have at least 12 feet of sidewalk space; Vernal Avenue north of Main Street has a 17 foot travel lane including an unmarked shoulder; and Vernal Avenue south of Main Street has a 28 foot unmarked lane used for travel and parking. Main Street has approximately eight feet of shoulder space, ten feet when including the gutter, which is currently used for on-street parallel parking.

The City used the findings from the 2018 Uintah County Trails Master Plan (described on page 1.15) to identify candidate streets for “complete streets” investment.



Existing Main Street Downtown Vernal Cross-section

As part of the 2020 Vernal City General Plan, the City outlined a goal to establish a “Complete Streets Program” that addresses all transportation modes

PARKING

Every street in the Downtown Vernal study area allows for on-street parallel parking, and several parking lots are located behind businesses along Main street for off-street parking (see map on this page). Despite this abundance in supply, many people surveyed and interviewed for this plan indicated lack of good parking, which is interpreted to mean parking lots with new surfacing, adequate signage, drainage, and safe lighting.

Connections between off-street parking lots to backs of businesses or Main Street are lacking features to provide a comfortable pedestrian and vehicle experience. The 2007 Vernal City Master Plan and 2020 Vernal General Plan cite underutilization of on-street parking on Main Street due to users’ concerns about the volume and speed of traffic. The 2007 Master Plan contains a concept to implement traffic calming design features along Main Street and to develop parking areas behind Main Street businesses to include pedestrian connections and amenities, as well as multiple parking garages.



5. DOWNTOWN DESIGN

DOWNTOWN DESIGN

The following pages explore the Vernal Downtown Plan design, both in terms of block design and street layout. The concepts consider which parcels are most suitable to be re-purposed or redeveloped based on the market analysis, discussions with the city, and an analysis of the overall connectivity and cohesion of downtown's development.

Without changing the back-of-curb, the proposed street designs offer ways to improve the pedestrian experience, add bike infrastructure where appropriate, maintain or increase safety measures, provide additional shade, and in general, enhance the look and feel of streets within the downtown.

Additional design recommendations--such as new or re-purposed buildings (depicted in yellow) and programming, such as a Walking Boulevard (depicted in teal)--are shown in the block design. This represents a pedestrian realm with lighting, seating, art and where appropriate, outdoor dining and event space. These walkways and plazas occupy the mid-block realm and help to create a more enjoyable pedestrian experience with less traffic noise and opportunity for placemaking. Additionally, this chapter shows a Public Space option for the downtown. The intention behind this design is to give visitors and residents a central gathering space, 18 hours a day, 365 days a year.

Each block identifies the primary goals, found in Chapter 2, accomplished by the proposed design. Across the entire Vernal Downtown Plan, all nine goals are met.



WALKING BOULEVARDS

Walking Boulevards are pedestrian-only rights-of-way connecting two streets. Not only are these spaces safer for pedestrians as they are separate from vehicular traffic, they are also more enjoyable as sounds from passing trucks and cars are buffered by buildings. These spaces are designed to a pedestrian scale with various amenities and pedestrian-oriented spaces. Recommended improvements reflect a particular context and may include trees, planters, pedestrian-scale lighting, special paving, and site furnishings. Examples of these can be found in the precedent images on this page.

This Vernal Downtown Plan incorporates Walking Boulevards as a pedestrian connection between the blocks, providing spaces to socialize, dine, rest, and recreate. These walkways have the additional opportunity to be decorative or themed where appropriate, with features such as dinosaur benches, similar to what is already found at bus stops within the downtown.

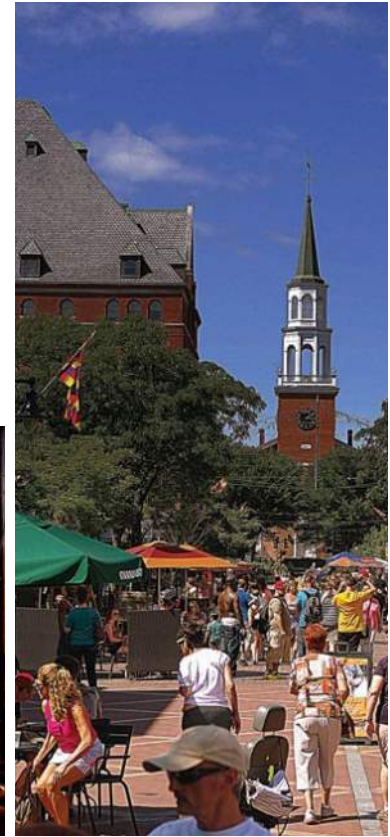
In addition to being comfortable and enjoyable, they can also be more functional and convenient pathways when traveling within the area. Unlike sidewalks, Walking Boulevards can accommodate higher foot traffic and provide more space for public gatherings and other flexible community programming. Additionally, these boulevards aren't adjacent to passing cars and trucks, thereby providing a quieter experience for pedestrians.



Flamingo Promenade - Las Vegas, NV



Fort Collins, CO

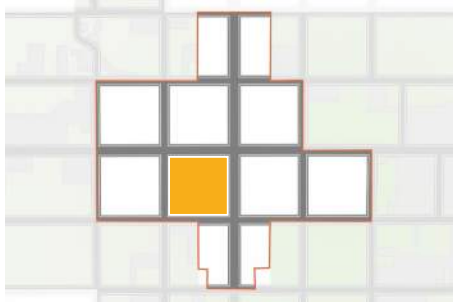


Church Street - Burlington, VT



Pearl Street - Boulder, CO

ZIONS



This design considers how redevelopment can include both a mixed-use product and residential, most likely in the form of town homes.

GOALS

ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 2	Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining & shopping and resolve parking challenges
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 1	Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively Downtown experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 3	Encourage new business ventures in vacant storefronts and empty parcels to create a thriving district.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 3	Create an inviting transition between the Downtown commercial district and nearby residential areas.



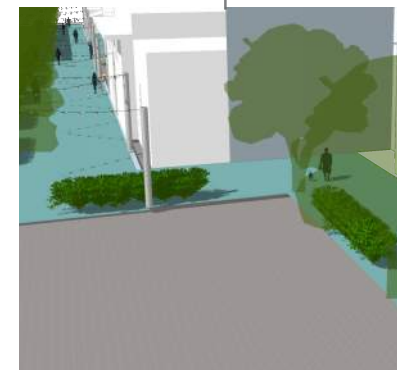
NOTE: ANYTHING RENDERED YELLOW OR BLUE DEPICTS AN IMPROVEMENT TO THE BLOCK.



MIXED USE BUILDING

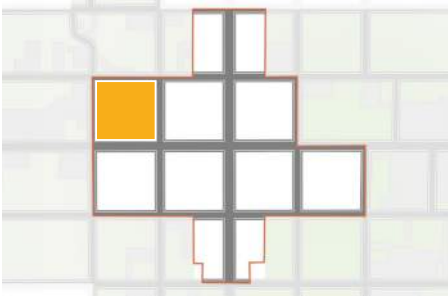


HOUSING



WALKING BOULEVARD - EAST

CHAMBER



This block has a light touch with the major two improvements including the parking and an archway that connects pedestrians accessing the Walking Boulevard from Main St. The design of this archway has potential to honor Vernal's history or the natural beauty surrounding the City.

GOALS

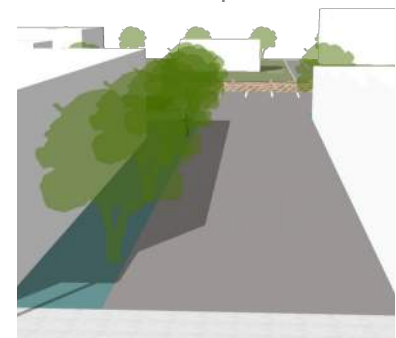
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 1	Build upon and expand the "Dinosaurland" brand for Downtown Vernal with complementary themes of natural resource amenities and outdoor recreation.
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 2	Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining and shopping and resolve parking challenges.
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 2	Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery and experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.



WALKING BOULEVARD

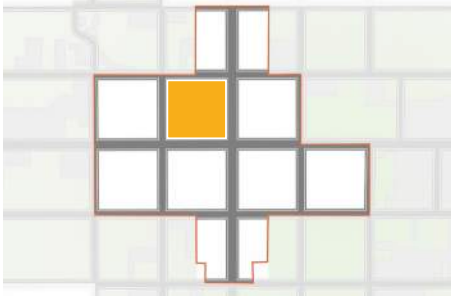


PARKING



VEHICULAR ACCESS

SAGE HOTEL



The Sage Block shows a pedestrian connection from Main St. to the mid-block that is shared with vehicular traffic. There is also a small connection made between the parking lots on the west and east side of the block. Additionally, this block proposes infill development.

GOALS

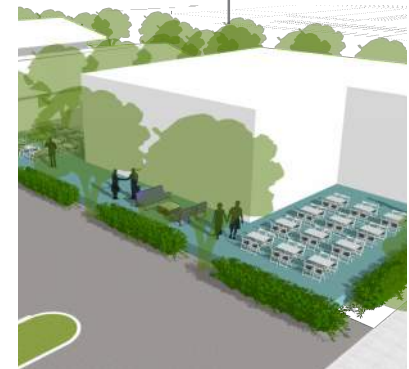
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 2	Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining & shopping and resolve parking challenges
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 1	Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively Downtown experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.



WALKING BOULEVARD

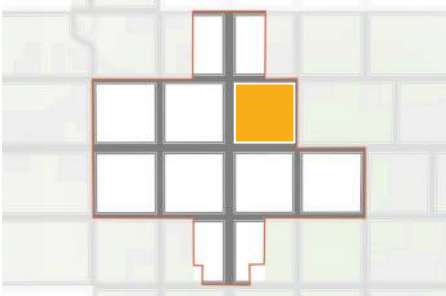


INFILL DEVELOPMENT



OUTDOOR SPACE / DINING

7-11 RANCH



With the 7-11 Ranch already a successful establishment in Downtown Vernal, the redevelopment shown could be an addition to the restaurant. Outdoor dining options create many opportunities to activate these spaces.

GOALS

ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 2	Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining & shopping and resolve parking challenges
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 2	Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery, & experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 2	Support enhancement and modernization of existing business storefronts, facilities and infrastructure.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.



POCKET PARK / OUTDOOR DINING

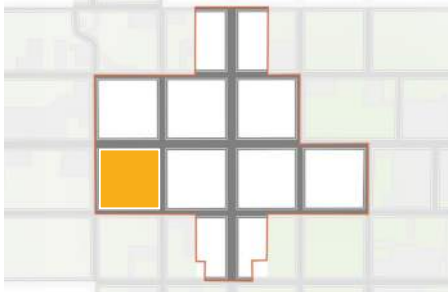


PARKING



PLAZA

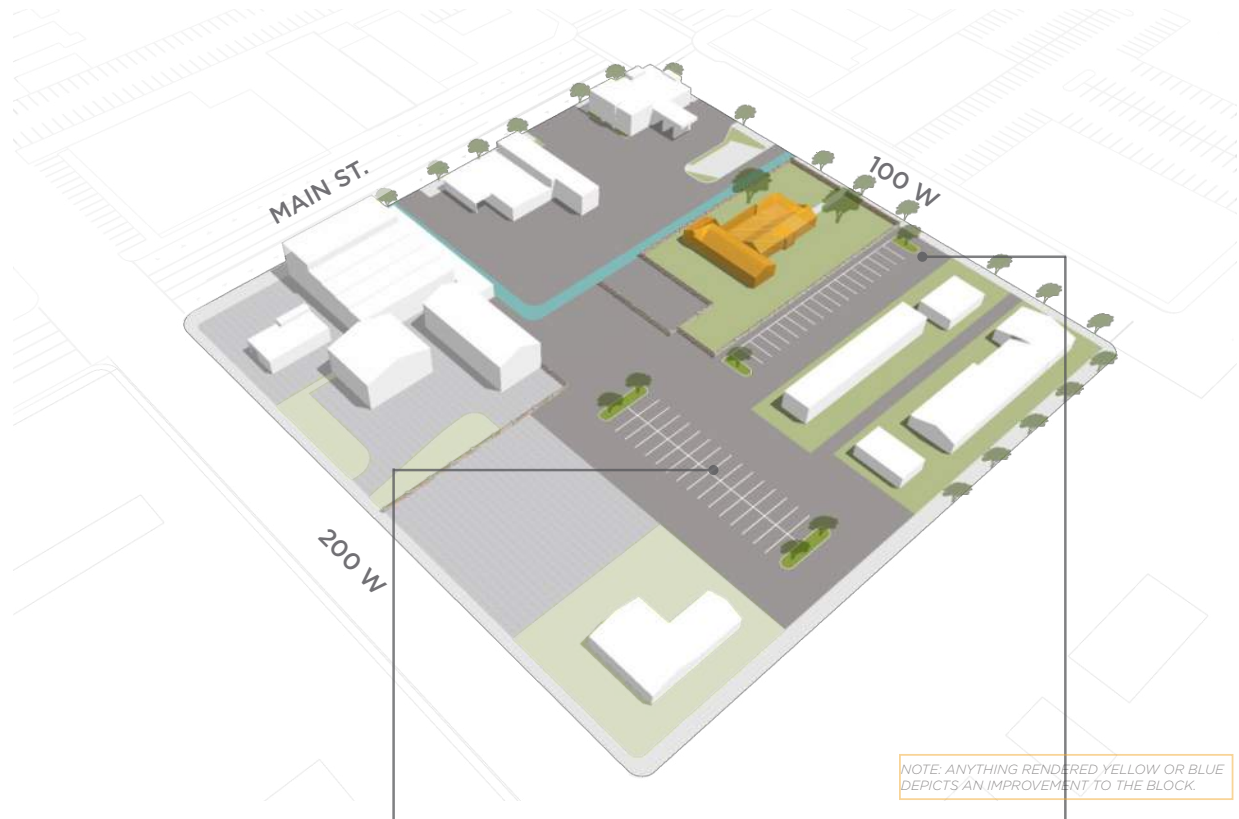
FARM EXCHANGE



This block is another proposed design with a light touch, showing improved parking for businesses and a redevelopment option for a Bed and Breakfast or cafe. As with the other blocks, there is a Walking Boulevard mid-block connection from Main St. to 100 W.

GOALS

ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 1	Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively Downtown experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 2	Support enhancement and modernization of existing business storefronts, facilities and infrastructure.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 3	Create and inviting transition between the Downtown commercial district and nearby residential areas.

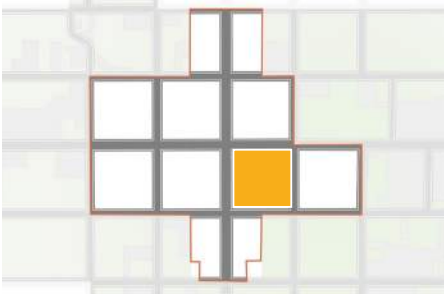


PARKING



ADAPTIVE REUSE

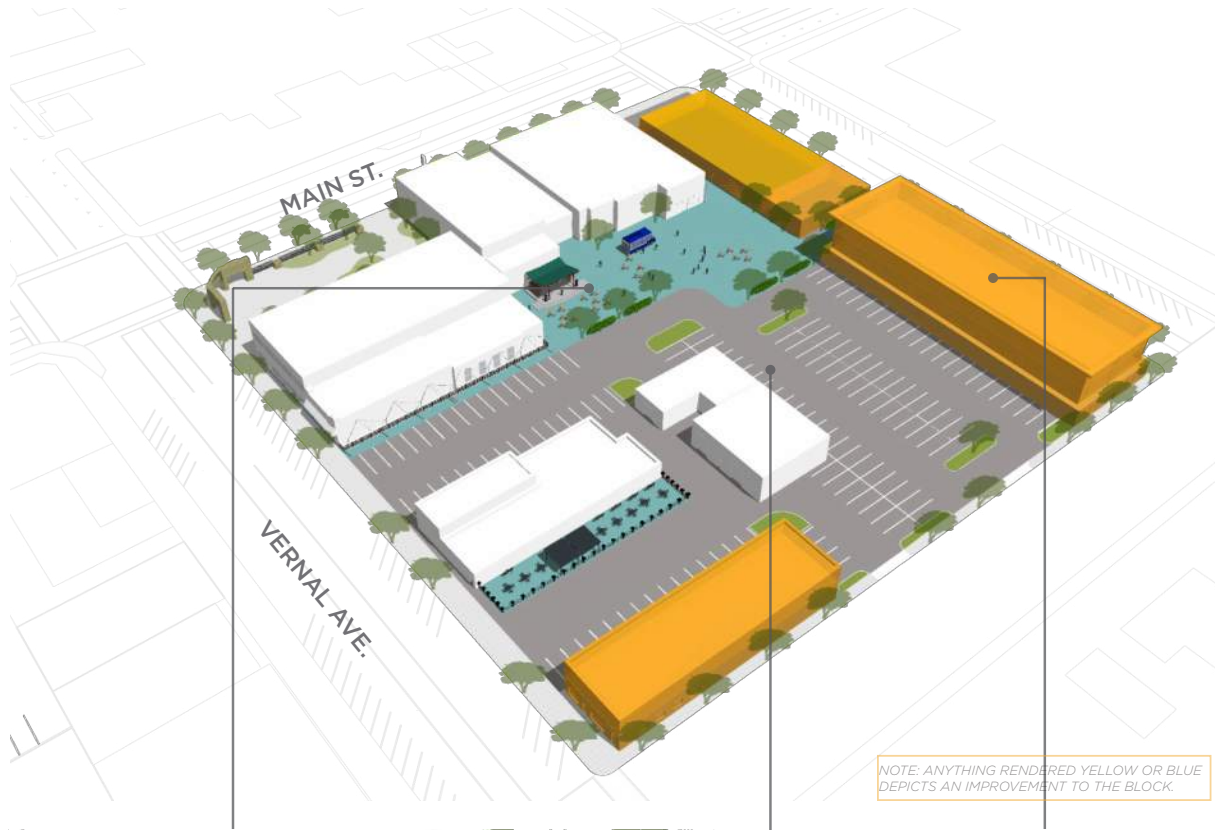
COBBLE ROCK



Cobble Rock block holds many exciting mid-block opportunities from outdoor performances by the Vernal Theater Company to patio dining. This block holds great potential to be a vibrant place to visit.

GOALS

ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 1	Build upon and expand the "Dinosaurland" brand theme for Downtown Vernal with Complementary themes of natural resource amenities and outdoor recreation.
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 2	Leverage side streets to provide sidewalk dining and shopping and resolve parking challenges.
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 2	Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery, & experience
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.



PLAZA

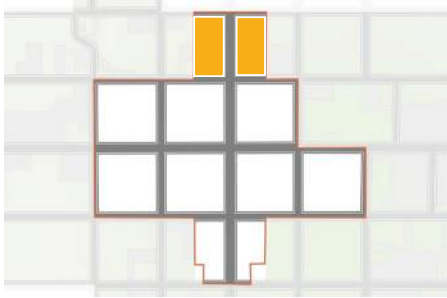


PARKING



INFILL DEVELOPMENT

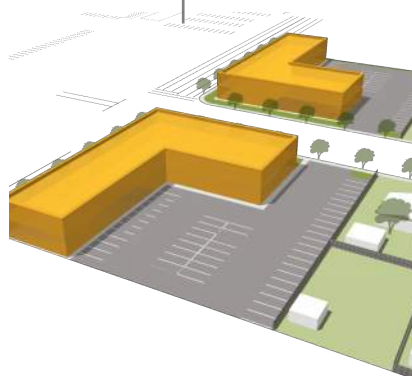
NORTH BLOCKS



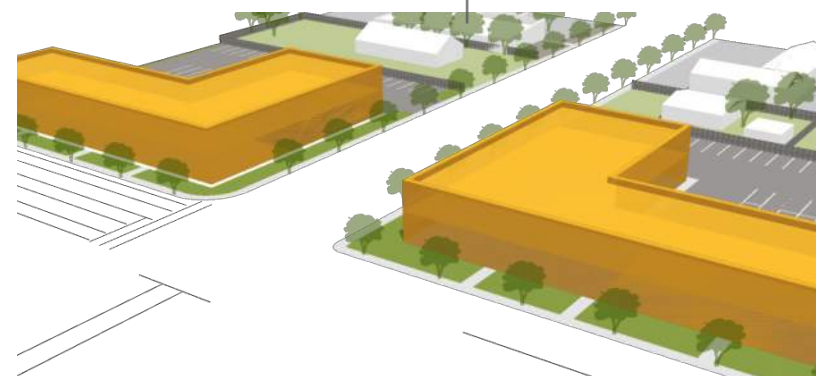
These two half blocks flanking Vernal Ave. are envisioned as having mixed-use development with ample parking to serve the businesses and residents. This block acts as a transition point where single family homes become the predominant land use.

GOALS

PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 1	Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively Downtown experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 3	Encourage new business ventures in vacant storefronts and empty parcels to create a thriving district.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.

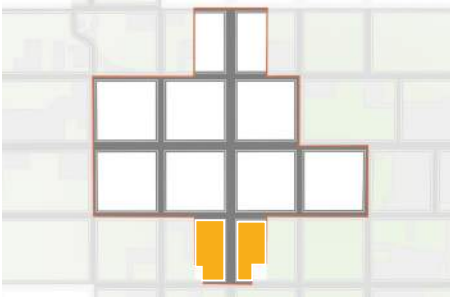


PARKING



MIXED USE DEVELOPMENT

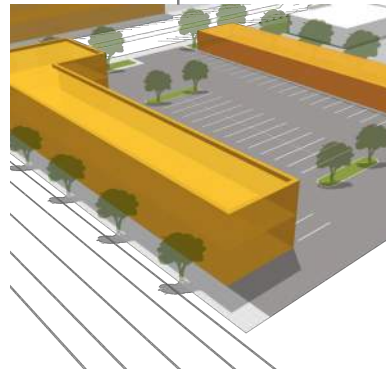
SOUTH BLOCKS



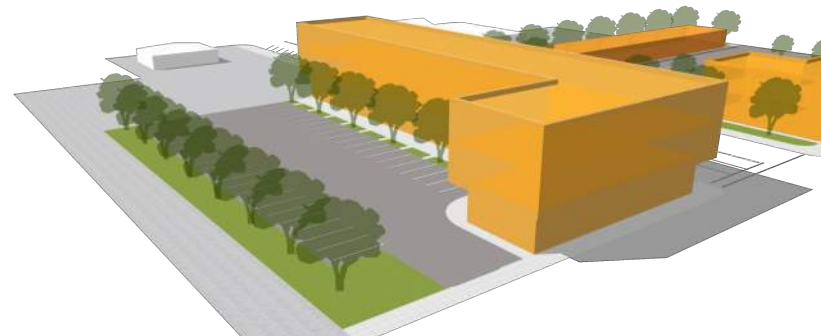
Similar to the North Blocks, these two half blocks flanking Vernal Ave. proposed design show mixed-use development with flexible parking options.

GOALS

PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 1	Support infill development, redevelopment and streetscape improvements to create a consistent and lively Downtown experience.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 3	Encourage new business ventures in vacant storefronts and empty parcels to create a thriving district.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.



OFFICES



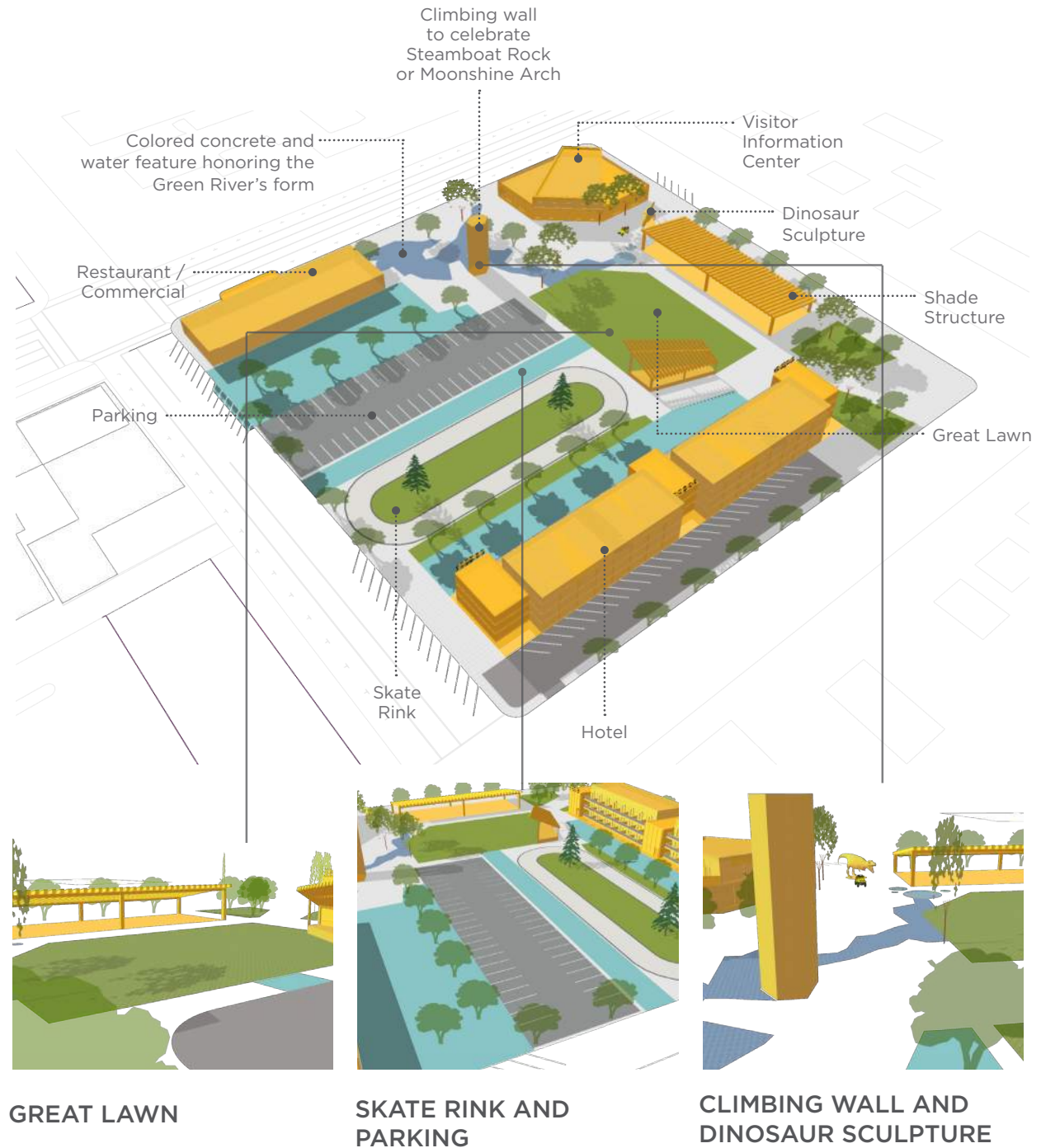
MIXED USE

PUBLIC SPACE

This concept for four acres of public space shows a Visitor Center, restaurant, hotel, outdoor recreation opportunities, skate ribbon, a flexible paved area that could host food trucks, and an event space with a stage and great lawn. This could fit in a number of areas within the downtown and could occupy either one entire block or pieces of neighboring blocks.

GOALS

ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 1	Build upon "Dinosaurland" brand for Downtown Vernal with complementary themes of natural resources amenities and outdoor recreation.
ICONIC AND MEMORABLE	G 3	Celebrate the historic nature of Vernal's Downtown by encouraging a welcoming, walkable district
PLACE FOR PEOPLE	G 2	Focus on creating destinations throughout downtown to encourage exploration, discovery, & experience
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 1	Support local business parking needs by creating intuitive signage and access and improving conditions at existing parking lots.
SUPPORT LOCAL BUSINESS	G 3	Support new business ventures in vacant storefronts and empty parcels to create a thriving district.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 1	Prioritize safety & comfort for people walking and biking.
ACTIVE AND CONNECTED	G 2	Support outdoor recreation and activities in Downtown.



PUBLIC SPACE USES

EVENTS CURRENTLY HELD IN VERNAL

- Half-marathon weekend
- Uintah County Fair week
- Vernal Excitement
- Farmer's Market
- Freedom Fest
- Block Party concert
- Rock the Ride concert series
- Alive After Five
- Rodeo Fair
- Rodeo Dances
- Balloon Fest
- RiverFest
- Trunk or Treat - Halloween afternoon
- Holly Days
- Movies in the Park



Independence Day Block Party



Independence Day Block Party



Dinah "SOAR" Days



Independence Day Block Party



Independence Day Block Party

PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Summers Photography

PUBLIC SPACE USES

ADDITIONAL POTENTIAL USES FOR THE SPACE

- Christmas Village
- Snow sculptures & ice castle - January
- Vernal Equinox party
- Cornhole tourneys / club
- October shops for Halloween
- Car shows
- Art shows
- High school dances
- Conference attendees - dinner / night event
- Business employee dinner / event
- Non-profit carnival fundraiser
- Relay for Life event
- Watch parties - Superbowl, state tournament, Friday night away games
- Mayor's tree lighting
- Mountain man rendezvous
- Races end downtown
- Pre-race dinners and rally
- Street bike race
- Oktoberfest
- Cinco de Mayo
- Cultural celebrations
- Mardi-Gras celebration - crawdaddy/potato broil
- Christmas Eve Community Celebration
- Mountain bike - pre-race rally
- Pickleball tournaments
- Country line dancing - once a week in summer
- Dance recitals
- Live music - open mic nights
- Veterans Day ceremony
- 9/11 flag display
- Lincoln Day Dinner
- Family reunions
- High school reunions



Armonk Outdoor Art Show



SLC Living Traditions



Lake Geneva WinterFest



El Segundo Main Street Car Show

<https://www.racingjunk.com/news/gallery-21st-annual-el-segundo-main-street-car-show/>

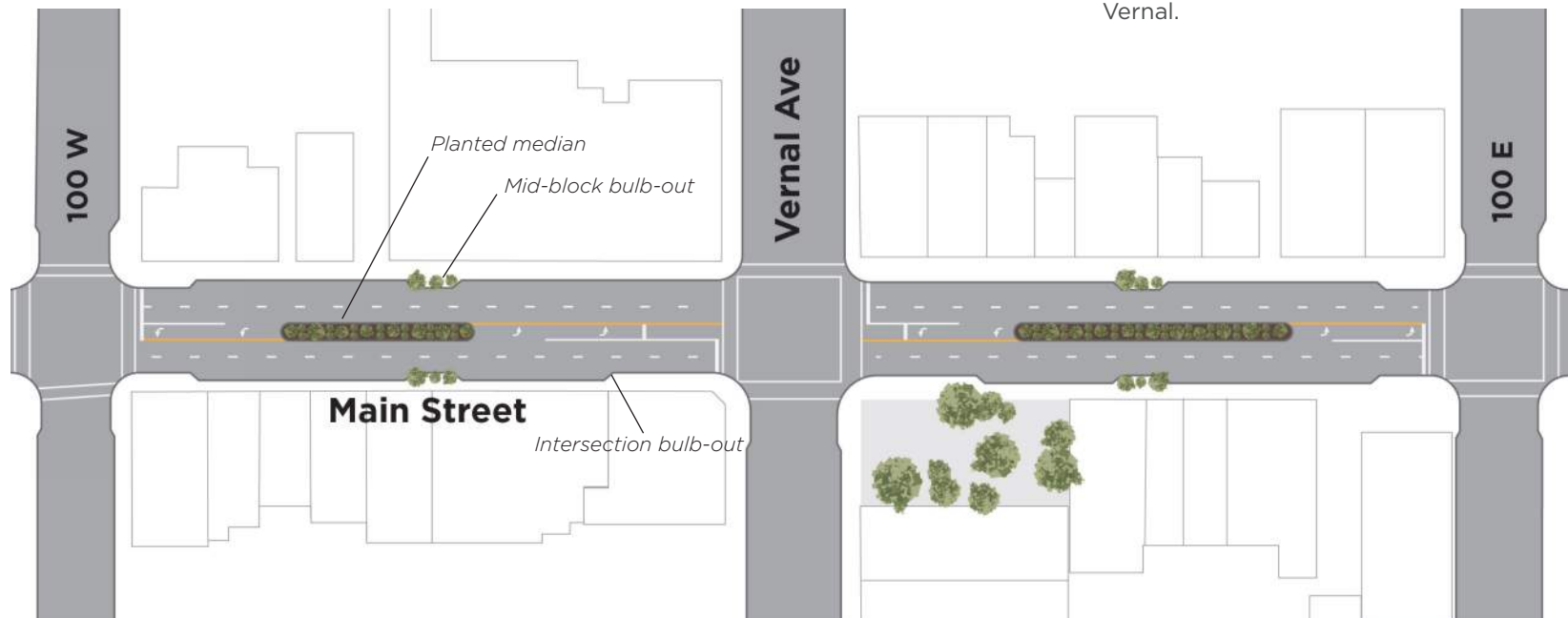
TRANSPORTATION

This chapter summarizes transportation recommendations for downtown Vernal, including recommended street typologies and high-level recommendations on other key transportation elements such as transit and large-vehicle parking. These recommendations are based on a review of existing conditions, a field visit, coordination with UDOT, and public input and are intended to interface closely with the Downtown Vision Cornerstone, Goals, and Strategies.

STREET TYPOLOGIES

Street typologies provide a general recommended cross section for key elements of the roadway for all modes of travel (vehicles/OHVs, bicycle, pedestrians) as well as parking. The following pages show “typical” sections that are intended to be illustrative and visually communicate key changes to the roadway and serve as a basis for further refined engineering and design.

Below, a site plan of Main Street depicts several proposed elements – bulb-outs and planted medians – that are intended to improve aesthetics and safety, without affecting vehicle traffic on this important state highway. Bulb-outs could be considered at mid-block locations and at certain intersections to increase the buffer between the roadway and building fronts, enhance the pedestrian experience, and provide additional space for street amenities. Adding striping to delineate parallel parking spaces will also guide drivers to parking in appropriate locations. Planted medians are proposed to increase the road aesthetics and improve the experience of driving through downtown Vernal.



BULBOUTS

Bulbouts offer additional space for plantings and placemaking elements such as pavers, art, planting, and amenities (benches, waste receptacles, bike racks and lighting). They can also add protection for parked cars and decreases the travel distance across busy roads for pedestrians. They encourage cars to drive slower and in general, provide the feeling of being “downtown.”

MID-BLOCK BULBOUTS

Bulbouts at mid-block locations could be used to increase the buffer between the roadway and building fronts, enhancing the sidewalk experience for pedestrians, and providing additional space for street furnishings, bike racks, plantings, or other amenities.

BULBOUTS AT INTERSECTIONS

Bulbouts at intersections reduce pavement width and distance needed for pedestrians to cross a street. Bulbouts tend to reduce vehicle turn speeds which also increases pedestrian safety. However, bulbouts require additional maintenance, present snow removal challenges, and could interfere with roadway drainage if not properly sited.

Bulbouts at intersections could affect large vehicle or truck turning movements if the intersection turning radii is reduced and mid-block bulbouts would reduce parking storage.

AREAS WHERE BULBOUTS ARE NOT RECOMMENDED

Intersection bulbouts are not recommended on the north legs of the Main Street/Vernal Avenue intersection due to the large volume of trucks and RVs that make turns at this intersection and concerns with reducing the vehicle turning radii.

RECOMMENDATIONS

In consideration of these factors, 8' bulbouts are recommended to effectively calm traffic, improve pedestrian comfort, and still allow for appropriate width of travel lanes. Implementing these features will require coordination with UDOT and business owners to ensure appropriate spacing and that parking needs are maintained.

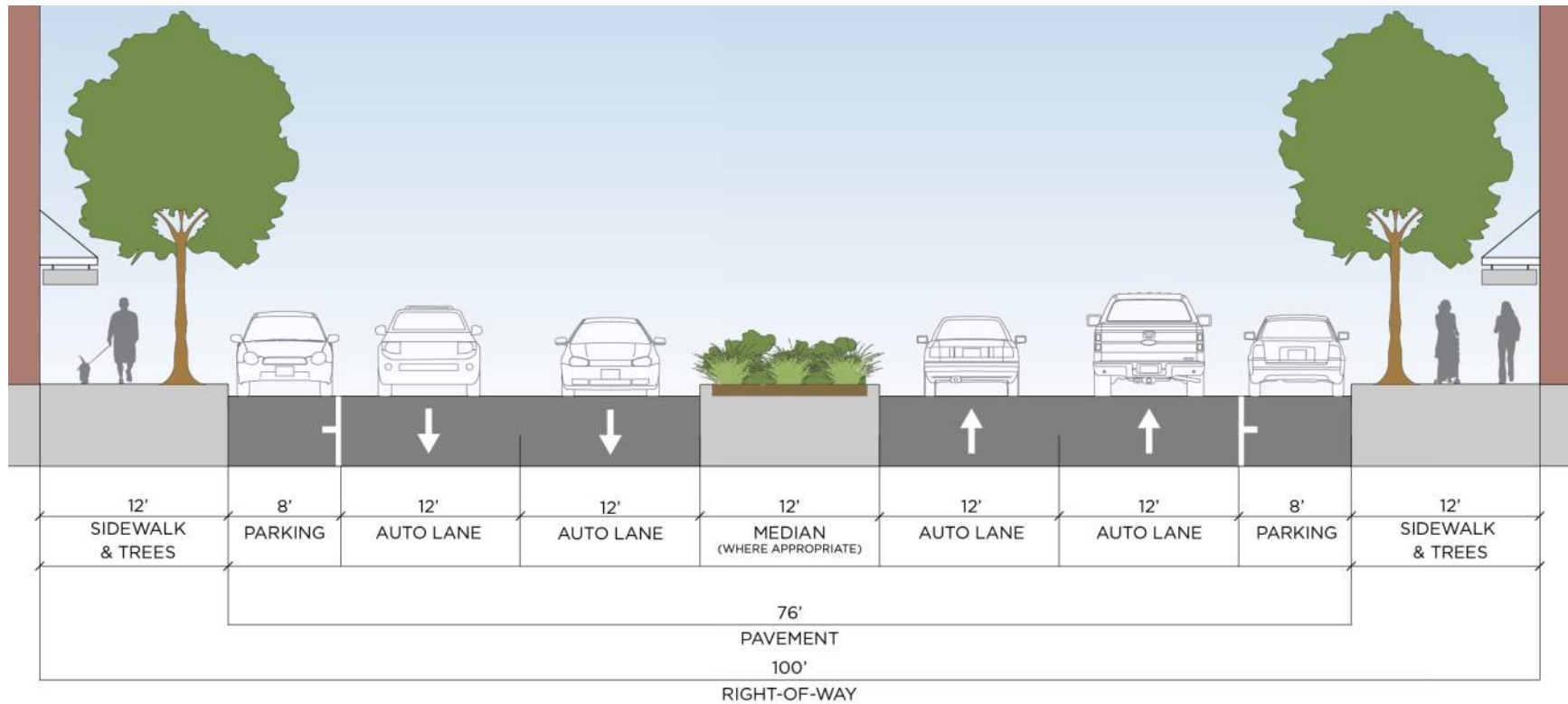


https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Landscaped_curb_extension.jpg

Bulbout Example



Google Streetview, Heber, UT, Bulbouts



MAIN STREET VERNAL DOWNTOWN TYPICAL

Main Street is the primary thoroughfare of Downtown Vernal and will need to accommodate truck and general traffic, parking for visitors, and an inviting pedestrian environment. Limited midblock crossings, bulbouts on some corners, and a planted median will enhance the pedestrian environment while preserving lane widths for traffic needs. It is recommended plantings be low profile and drought tolerant.



Replace two-way left turn with median



No recommended facilities

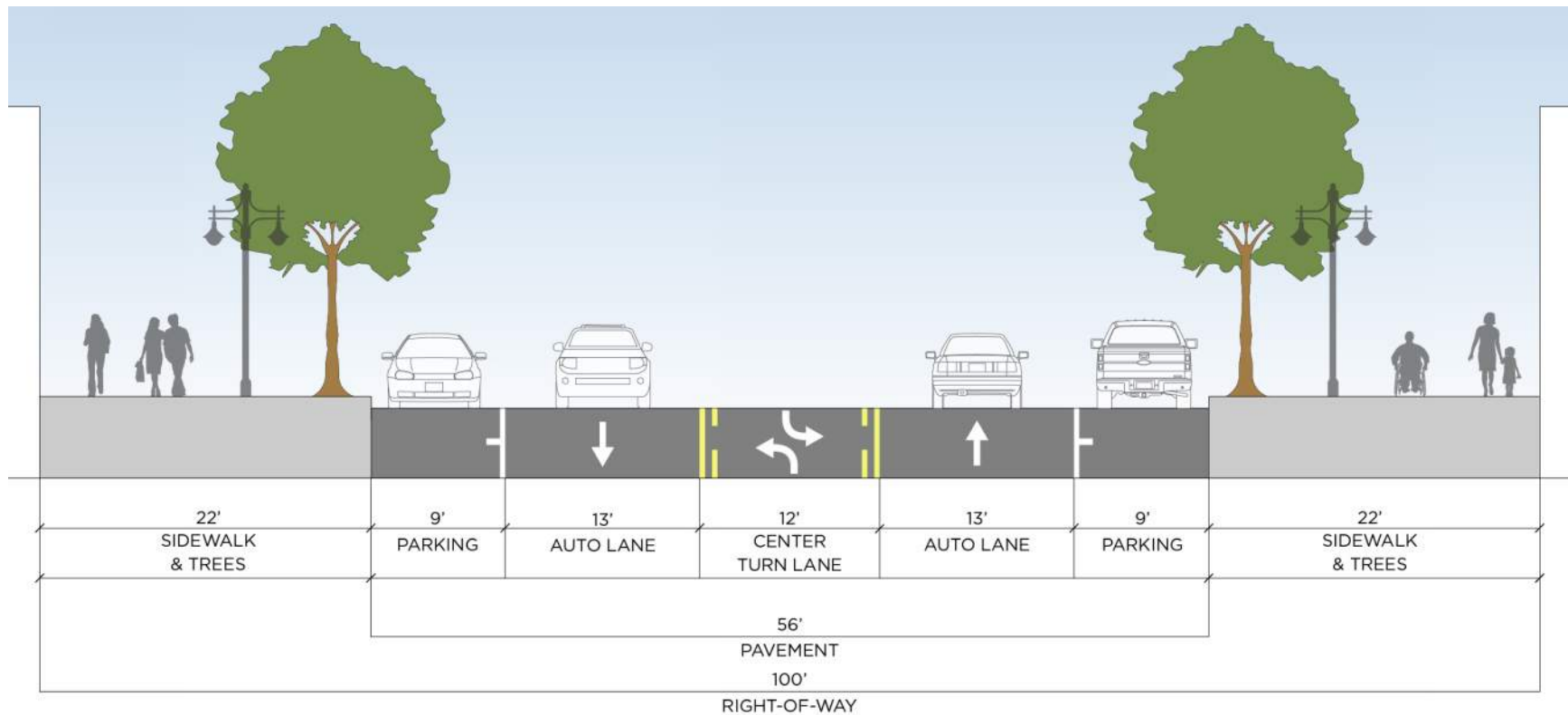


Improved experience



Minor reduction for bulbouts





VERNAL AVENUE NORTH OF MAIN

North of Main Street, Vernal Avenue will need to accommodate truck and general traffic while still providing parking opportunities and enhanced pedestrian space. Parallel parking and a wider pedestrian environment will provide plenty of pedestrian access while providing ample space for trucks and other traffic.



Reduce lanes to one in each direction



No recommended facilities

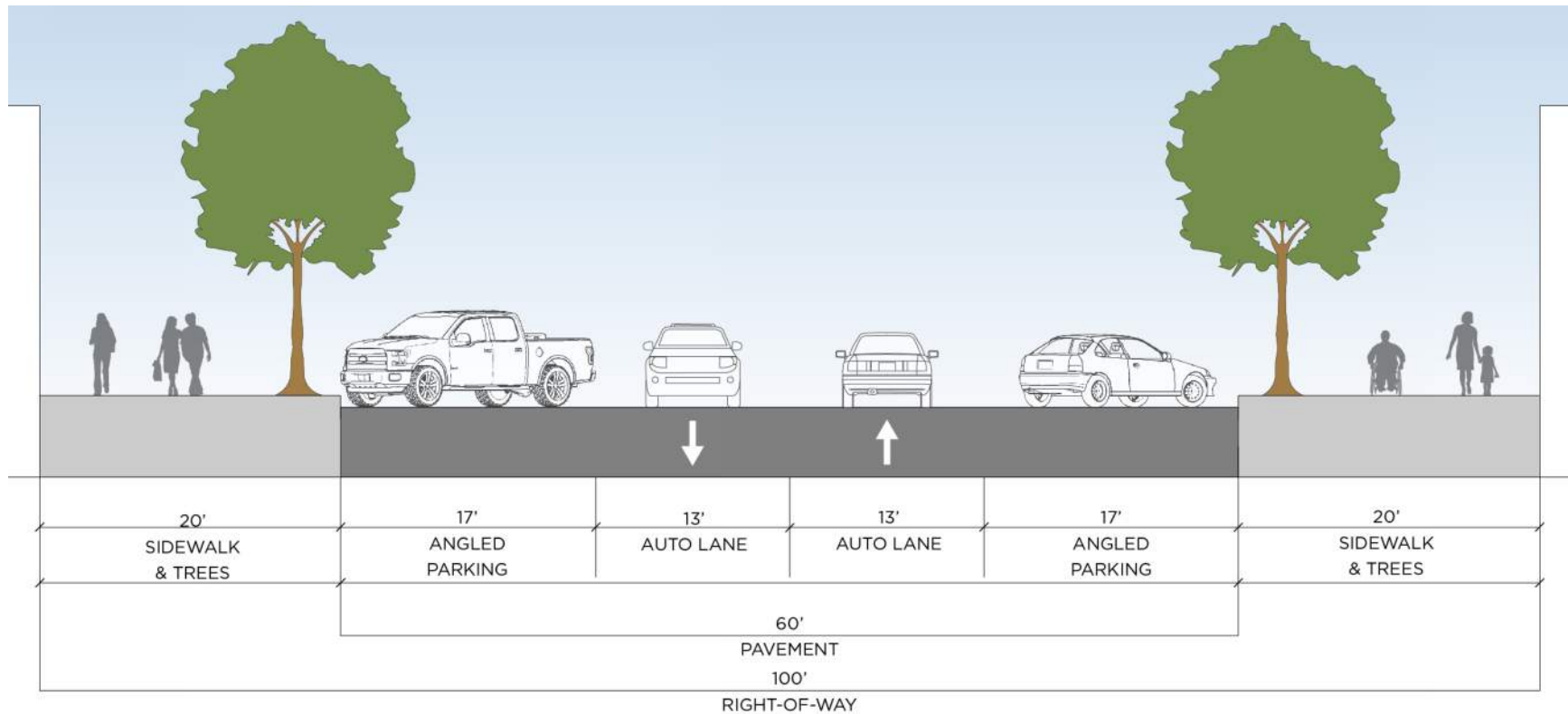


Wider pedestrian facilities



Designated parallel parking spaces





VERNAL AVENUE SOUTH OF MAIN

South of Main Street, Vernal Avenue currently has a relatively low traffic volume. With ample opportunity for future mixed use, retail, and housing, this segment of Vernal Avenue will provide angled parking for visitors, ample sidewalk space, and decorative lighting.



Add median and reduce lane widths



No recommended facilities

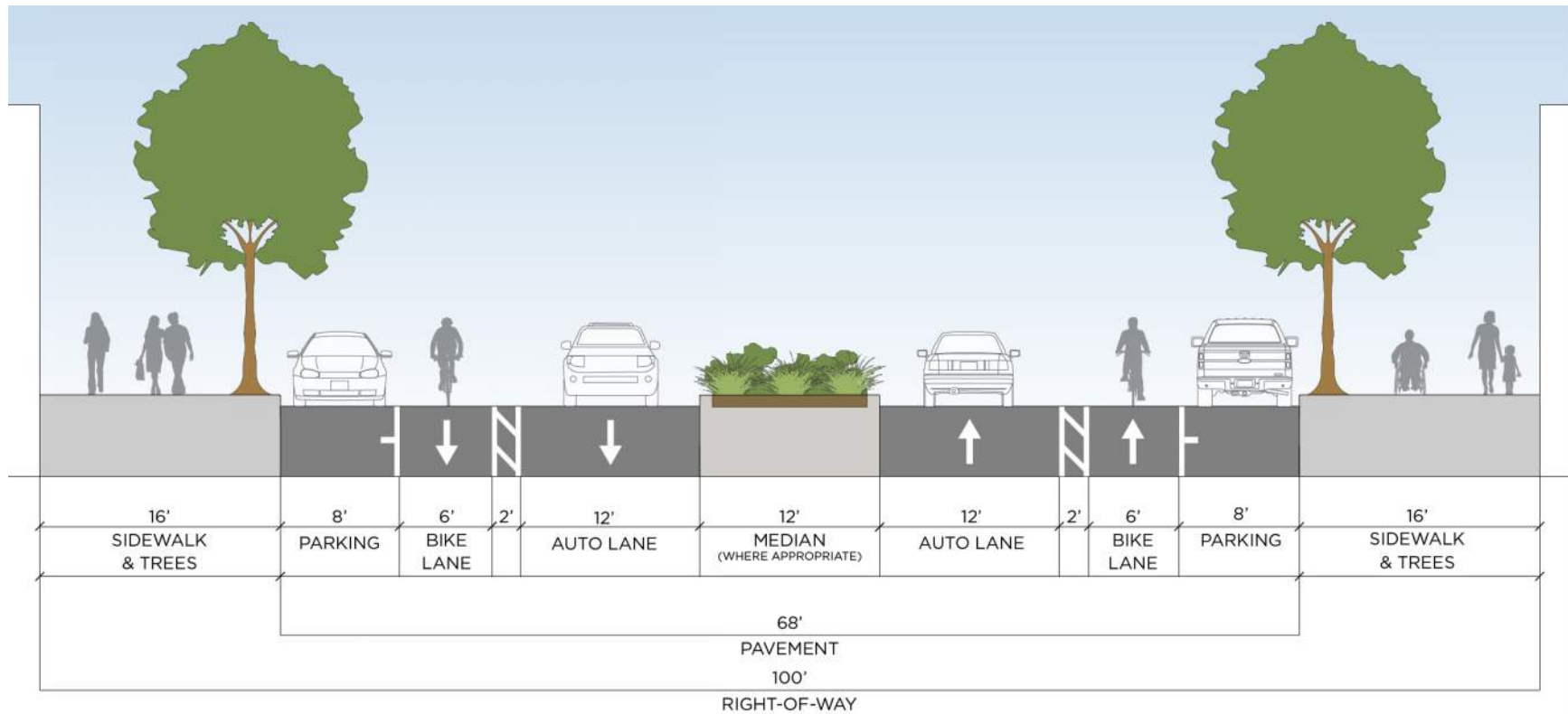


Wider pedestrian facilities



Angled parking on both sides





VERNAL AVENUE SOUTH OF MAIN 100 S TO 500 S

From 100 South to 500 South, Vernal Avenue will serve as a multimodal connection from Downtown to South Vernal. Improvements will include the addition of parking, bike lanes, and ample pedestrian space.



Add median and
reduce lane widths



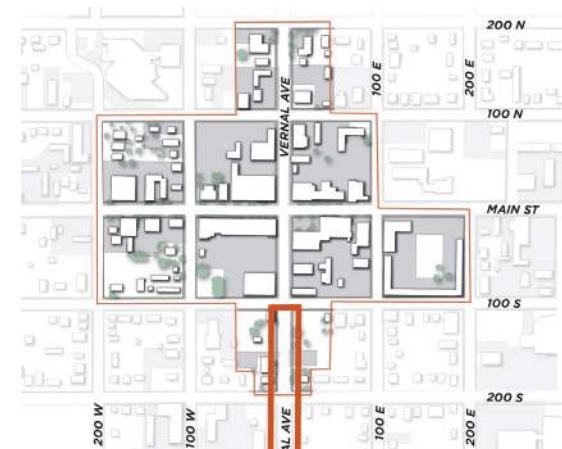
Parking buffered
bike lanes

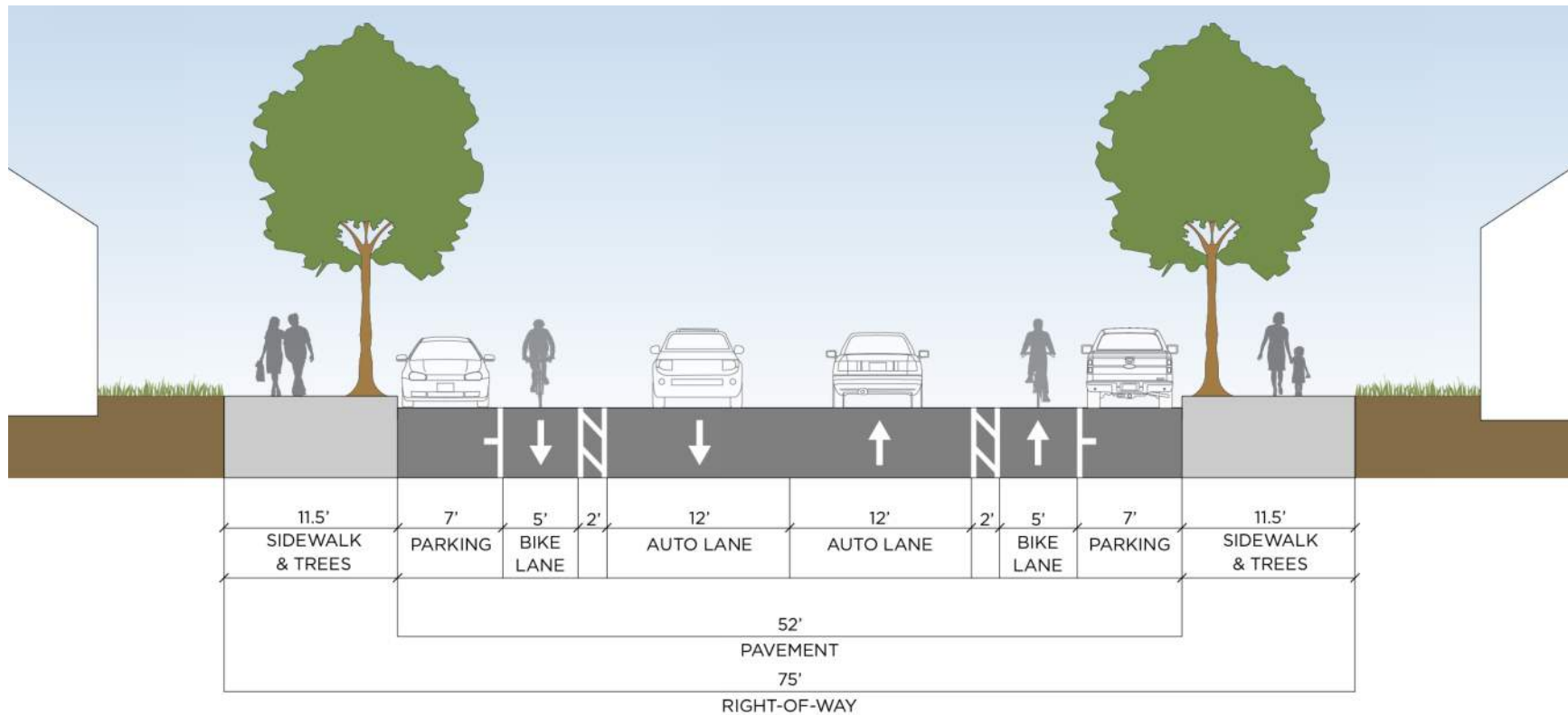


Wider pedestrian
facilities



Designated parallel
parking spaces





VERNAL DOWNTOWN CROSS STREETS 100 N & S, 100 E & W

As seen in the map to the right, select segments of 100 South, 100 North, 100 East, and 100 West will serve as multimodal connectors and will include a buffered bike lane, parallel parking, and an enhanced pedestrian environment.



Reduce lane widths to 12 feet



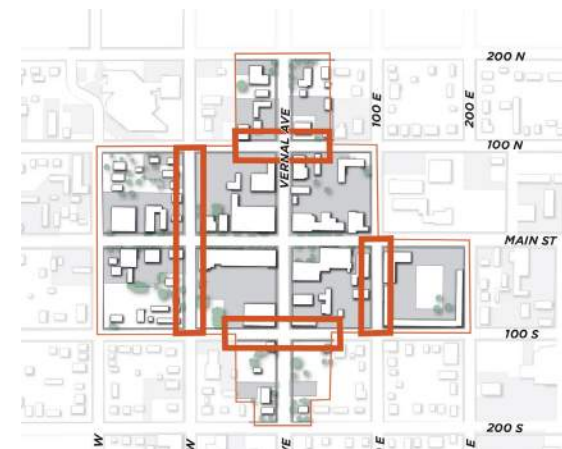
Buffered bike lanes

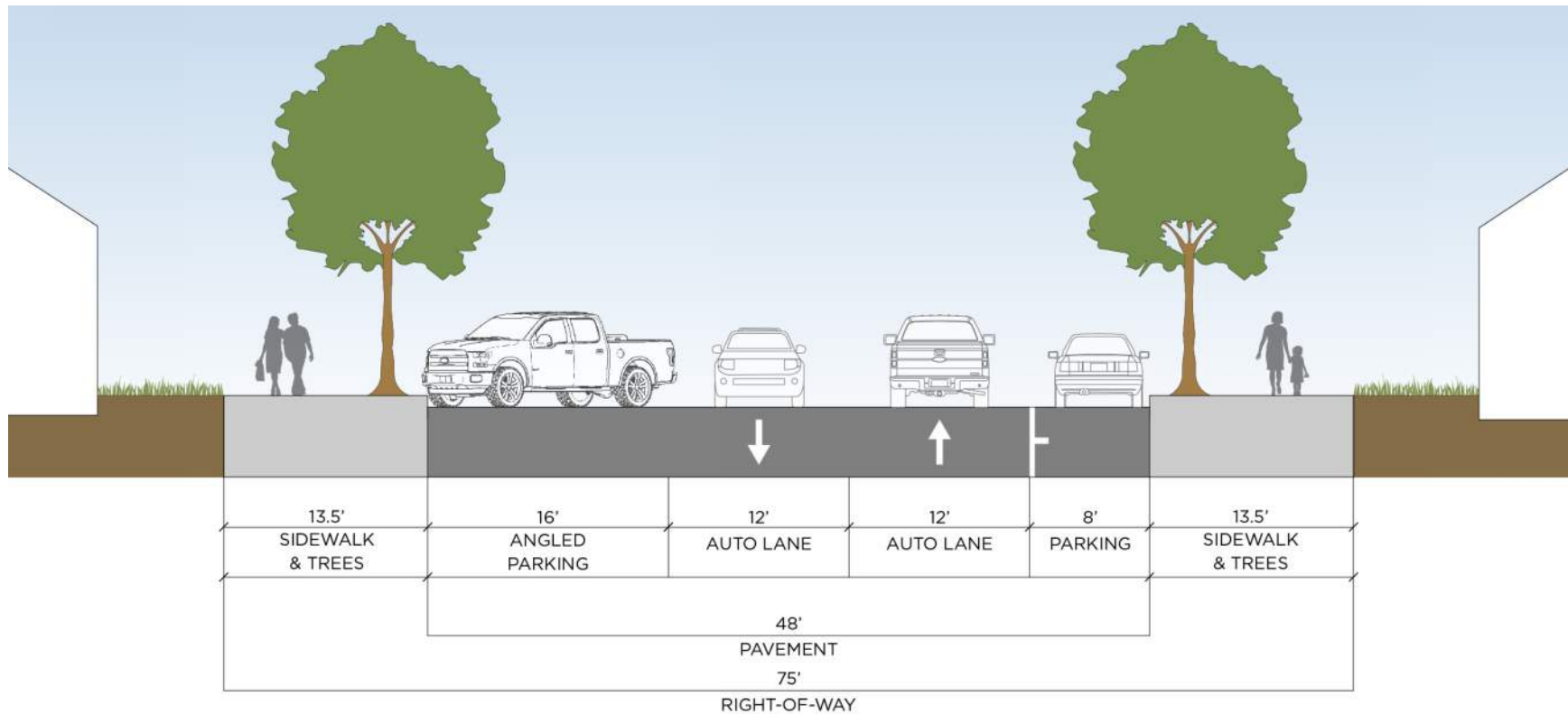


Wider pedestrian facilities



Designated parallel parking spaces





VERNAL DOWNTOWN CROSS STREETS WITH ANGLED PARKING

As seen in the map to the right, select segments of 200 South, 200 North, 200 West, 200 East, and 100 South will provide ample parking for visitors, including OHVs. These segments will include angled parking and parallel parking where feasible. These segments will also include an enhanced pedestrian environment.



Reduce lane widths to 12 feet



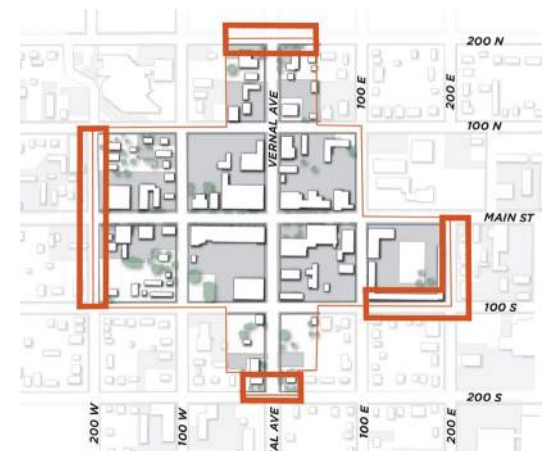
No recommended facilities



Wider pedestrian facilities



Angled and parallel parking



TRANSIT

To best leverage the proposed east-west Walking Boulevard and key destinations in the area, additional amenities are proposed to the BTA Green/Red route stop between Main and 100 North, west of Vernal Avenue. This could include:

- 1) Wayfinding signage along Walking Boulevard and on Main Street near 100 West to connect pedestrians to transit
- 2) More prominent transit stop flag and incorporation of downtown wayfinding elements as applicable
- 3) Incorporate tactile and visual cues on curbs to delineate transit loading zones. Use pavers, paint, or railings with high-contrast colors or materials to guide pedestrians to loading/alighting area
- 4) Consider additional stop amenities, such as combined schedule and route maps, shaded sitting areas, additional low-height landscaping, and bike racks



LARGE VEHICLE PARKING

On-street parking cannot accommodate large vehicles, such as RVs. Parking stalls to accommodate such vehicles should be approximately 18 by 55 feet and could be configured as pull-through or back-in angled parking stalls. Parking lot drive aisles should be wide enough to accommodate wide vehicles and lot curb radii should allow for wide turning radii of motorhomes and vehicles pulling trailers.

Potential options for accommodating large vehicle parking:

- Zion's lot
- Cobblestone lot off 100 South

EMERGING TRENDS AND CURB SPACE MANAGEMENT

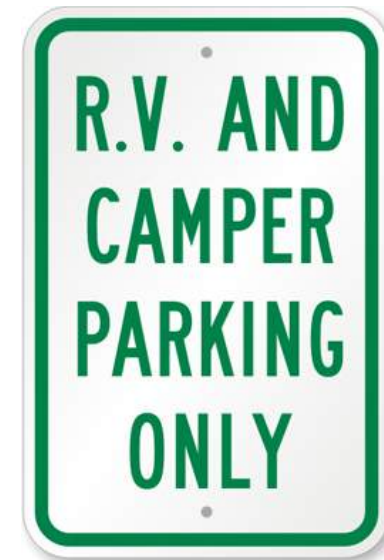
As transportation technology continues to evolve around the world, curbspace management in accommodating these trends remains a localized challenge. Similar to incorporating features such as bulbouts, considerations need to be made at a block-by-block basis to understand the current usage and needs. Trends for consideration include:

- Growth of ride-hail and transportation network companies such as Uber and Lyft
- Increased influence of e-commerce and delivery

- Potential expansion of scooters and bike share programs

Strategies to respond to these trends may include:

- Designated shared use zones that could serve transportation network companies and e-commerce/delivery zones
- Clearly designated areas for dropoff/pickups for scooters or bike shares





6. DESIGN GUIDELINES

DESIGN GUIDELINES

Through the course of this project, community members have articulated their hopes for Downtown Vernal. While there was a range of suggestions, one vision that continually rose to the surface was the desire for improvements to the appearance of downtown.

This chapter identifies standards to be met, for both existing and new development, by providing clear expectations of what projects must demonstrate to be successful. These Design Guidelines promote a thoughtful approach to downtown's design based on existing historic styles of architecture and standardizing components of the downtown look and feel that have proven successful.

Each guideline is described at the top of the page followed by a sidebar that explains the rationale for the guidelines.

The primary elements articulated within each guideline relate to the site design, architecture, and public realm. Each guideline therefore has an alpha-numeric code that identifies which element is being depicted. Within Site Design, the guidelines will begin with letter S, Architecture, A, and Public Realm, P. The implementation strategies for proposed recommendations are found in the following sections.

DESIGN GUIDELINES

SITE DESIGN



S1	Building Setbacks	6.6
S2	Mid-block Design	6.7
S3	Walking Boulevards	6.8
S4	Pedestrian-Oriented Streets	6.9

ARCHITECTURE



A1	Facade Material and Treatment	6.11
A2	Side and Back of Building Improvement	6.12-6.13
A3	Window Treatment	6.14
A4	Building Height Requirements & Use	6.15
A5	Awning and Shade	6.16

PUBLIC REALM



P1	Planting	6.18
P2	Wayfinding	6.19
P3	Sidewalk Design	6.20
P4	Public Parking Lots	6.21

STEAMBOAT SPRINGS, CO



SOURCE: TRIP ADVISOR



SITE DESIGN

S1 Building Setbacks

S2 Mid-block Design

S3 Walking Boulevards

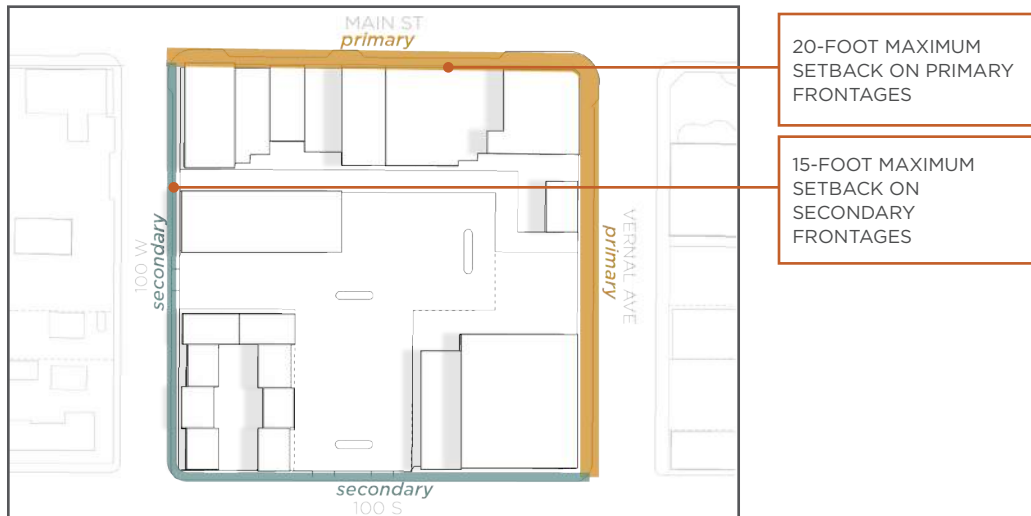
S4 Pedestrian-Oriented Streets

S1

BUILDING SETBACKS

The minimum setback for buildings within the Vernal Downtown Plan is five feet and a maximum setback of 15 to 20 feet, from the property line and dependent on the width and alignment of the street. This distance is intended to allow for landscaped areas, street furnishings, outdoor dining, and a pedestrian walk.

- >> Setback distance to improve pedestrian experience and may depend on building's use.
- >> 15 foot maximum setback for Cross Streets
- >> 20 foot maximum setback for Vernal Ave. and Main St.
- >> The maximum setback may be increased to accommodate existing utilities.



Blanding, UT



Casper, WY.

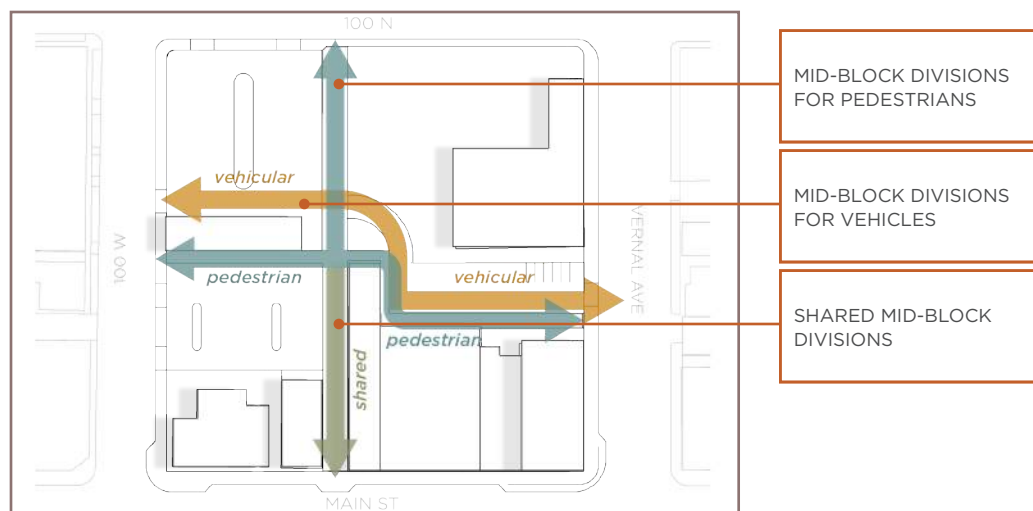
SOURCE: NATIONAL PARKS SERVICES.

S2

MID-BLOCK DESIGN

Mid-Block design promotes a more comfortable pedestrian experience by providing spaces that are removed from the immediate noise of passing cars and trucks along Main St. The mid-block design allow for greater access to destinations and more choices for pedestrians. Some may provide interesting aspects such as historical character, art and in general, improved walkability in the downtown.

- >> Mid-block divisions may be pedestrian-only or shared between vehicles and pedestrians and consequently these connection sizes vary dependent on use.
- >> Adequate lighting and signs crucial for safety and wayfinding to and from the interior block, whether that is parking, plazas, or the walking boulevard.
- >> Division of mid-block size largely dependent on existing land use and parcel ownership.



SOURCE: PENNSYLVANIA GREAT OUTDOORS VISITORS BUREAU

Tionesta Market Village, PA.



SOURCE: EATER CHICAGO

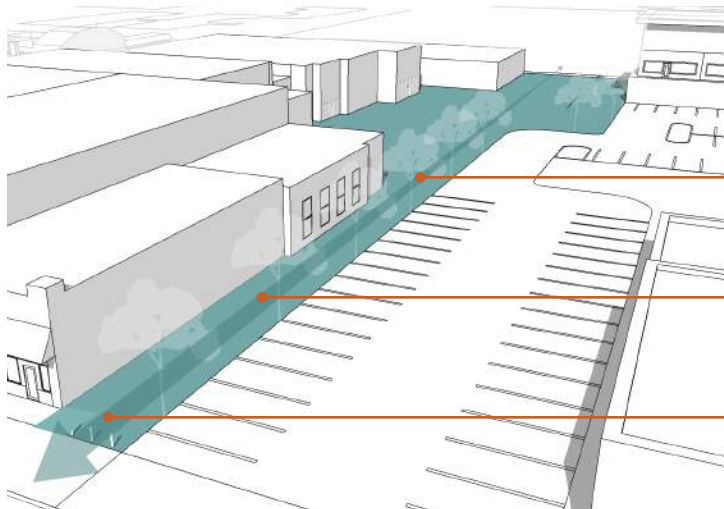
Las Fuentes, Chicago, IL (back of building)

S3

WALKING BOULEVARDS

A walking boulevard is a pedestrian passageway that acts as a mid-block connection between the main sidewalks. They add to the pedestrian interest and overall quality of the downtown, while also expanding retail opportunities with spaces for restaurants and cafes. 100 E between Vernal Ave. and 100 N and S will have the option to be designated pedestrian-only for special events.

- >> Twelve foot minimum unless not possible due to parcel size and ownership.
- >> Maintain visibility through the Walking Boulevard from adjacent buildings.
- >> Design elements for boulevard include seating, potted plants, shallow/recessed store windows, vines for color and interest, fin signs, lighting, banners for color, kiosks, awning and clear pedestrian through-way.
- >> Bollards, removable signs and roll-curbs along 100 E allows for pedestrian-only designation.



VISIBILITY
THROUGHOUT
WALKING BOULEVARD

12-FOOT MINIMUM
WIDTH

BOLLARDS AND
PLANTING TO
DESIGNATE
PEDESTRIAN-ONLY
SPACE



Pearl Street, Boulder, CO.



Grand Junction, CO.

SOURCE: COLORADO TOURISM OFFICE

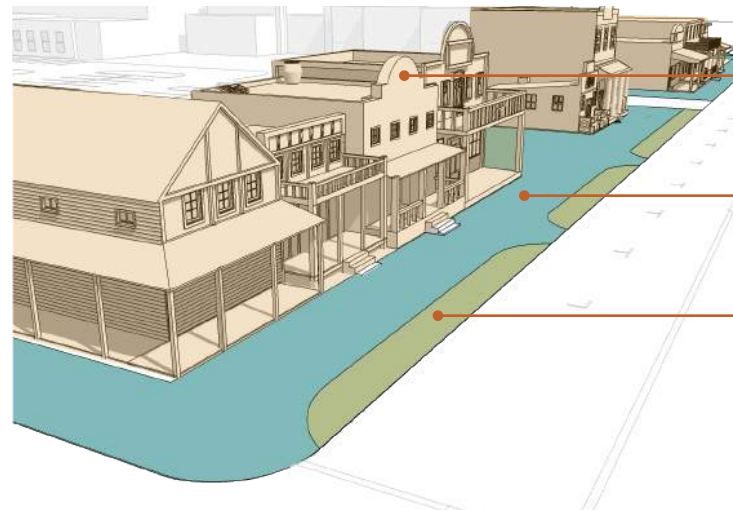
SOURCE: COLORADO TOURISM OFFICE

S4

PEDESTRIAN-ORIENTED STREETS

These pedestrian-oriented streets are largely geared towards **100 East**. However, a number of these designs could be flexible for other streets, similar to the options show below.

- >> **Walking Friendly:** Multimodal options, on-street parking spaces, comfortable walkways, and frequent street crossings.
- >> **Pedestrian-Only:** No vehicle access/parking, wider pathways, and increased amenities (seating, shade covering, landscaping, etc.). Differences in road surfacing such as pavers will indicate special use in the pedestrian only realm.
- >> **Pedestrian-Only - Western Frontier Town Theme:** rustic design, wood materials, engaging building fronts, Western-style public art.



WESTERN FRONTIER THEMED ARCHITECTURE

PEDESTRIAN-ONLY WALKWAY

LANDSCAPE BUFFER AND STREETSCAPE AMENITIES



SOURCE: METROLINK TRAINS

Walking Friendly



SOURCE: THE URBANIST

Pedestrian Only



SOURCE: DESTINATION 360

Pedestrian Only (Western Frontier Town Theme)



ARCHITECTURE

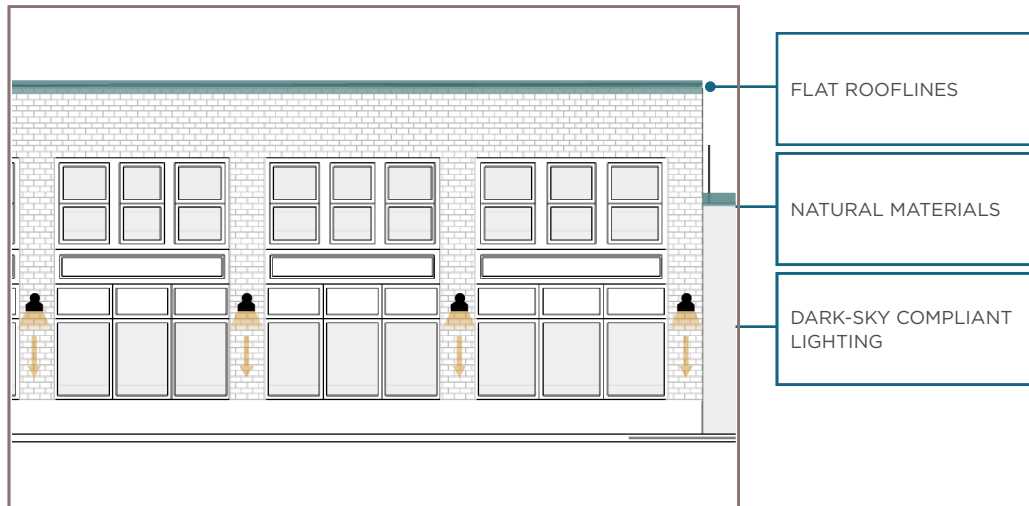
- A1** Facade Material and Treatment
- A2 Side and Back of Building Improvements
- A3** Window Treatment
- A4** Building Height Requirement
- A5** Awnings

A1

FACADE MATERIAL AND TREATMENT

The built environment within Downtown Vernal is to preserve and build on the existing building character. Existing noteworthy architecture includes the Zions Bank, built in the 1920s, and buildings from the 1960s and 1970s, many of which hold a historic character that contributes to the overall look and feel of the downtown.

- >> Natural materials are to be used such as wood, steel and stone. Materials such as stucco deemed inappropriate for the downtown.
- >> Lighting on buildings shall comply with Dark Sky Initiative.
- >> Rooflines shall be flat without visible pitch from public right-of-way.



Steamboat Springs, CO

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Hailey, ID

SOURCE: PINTREST/ MARY HUMPHREY

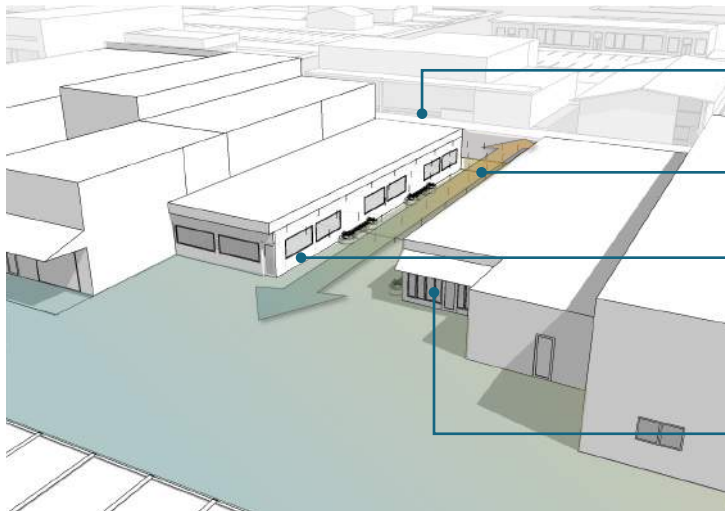
A2

SIDE AND REAR OF BUILDING IMPROVEMENT

The side and rear of building in Downtown Vernal necessitates design guidelines due to the Plan's mid-block design. Consideration of the awnings, window treatment, signs, and vertical separation between the upper floors and first floor of building is therefore necessary.

With the Plan's mid-block design, the pedestrian experience is extended to other sides of the buildings. In addition to the façade improvements, areas to the side and rear also need a cohesive design, public art, and other forms of beautification.

It can also be activated as a destination spot and place for gathering. Therefore, mid-block spaces are recommended to draw in people traveling along the walking boulevards and serve as engaging connection points throughout the area.



PRIMARY PUBLIC
ENTRANCE

MID-BLOCK WALKING
BOULEVARD WITH
HUMAN-SCALE DETAILS

BUILDING SIDES WITH
WINDOWS OR MURALS

SECONDARY PUBLIC
ENTRANCE ALONG
WALKING BOULEVARD



Casper, WY



Little B's, Vernal, UT

A2

SIDE AND REAR OF BUILDING IMPROVEMENT (CONTINUED)

- >> Primary public entrance along street with secondary entrance along Walking Boulevard or parking lot to allow direct access to building
- >> On building sides that are greater than one story and over 50' in length, building breaks in the facade shall be included to reduce the perceived scale of the buildings. These may include articulations, balconies, or changes in material.
- >> Where windows are not possible, murals are also an acceptable treatment for side or back of building facade.
- >> Consider the streetwall and human-scale details that correspond to the walking speed along Walking Boulevards.
- >> Activate building corners to build pathway continuity and direction into the additional public spaces, using railings, coordinated pavers, public art, signage, lighting, planters, or other amenities visually accessible from the sidewalks.
- >> Avoid or minimize blank walls and cover or decorate utilities boxes.
- >> Organize the public space to support adjacent uses.



SOURCE: AIRBNB

Downtown Estes Park, CO



Trimble Court, Fort Collins, CO



Dairy Block, Denver, CO



Arts Corner Program, Grand Junction, CO

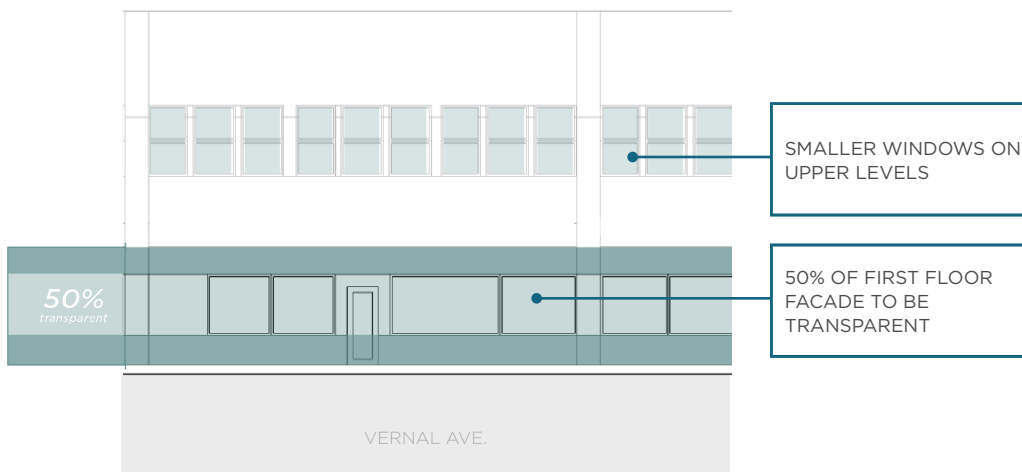
SOURCE: DOWNTOWN GRAND JUNCTION CO/ JODIE BLISS

A3

WINDOW TREATMENT

Windows are an important architectural component as they allow for street transparency. This warrants large glass windows on street-level facades, where opaque, tinted, or reflective glass is unsuitable. A minimum of 50% of facade area on first floor facing Main St. or Vernal Ave shall consist of glass and ideally, a minimum of 40% of facade facing other streets or mid-block shall consist of glass.

- >> 50% first floor facade facing Main St. or Vernal Ave. is to be glass windows.
- >> 40% of first floor facade facing other streets or mid-block shall consist of glass.
- >> Smaller windows are allowed on upper levels, especially where mixed-use development provides housing product.



Logan, UT

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Steamboat Springs, CO

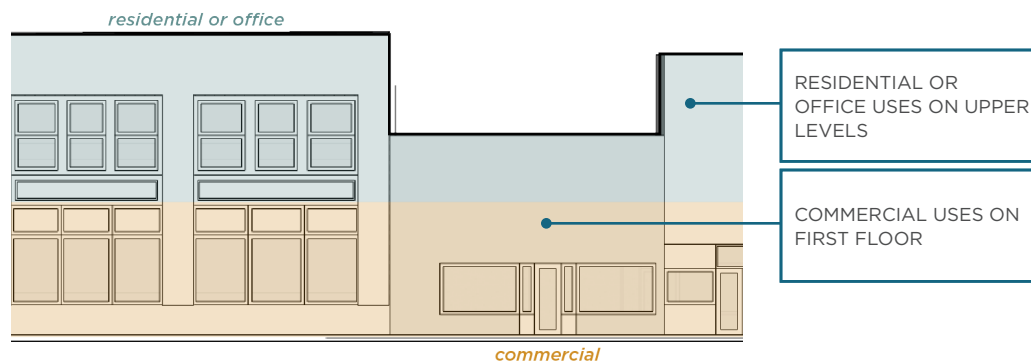
SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A4

BUILDING HEIGHT REQUIREMENTS AND USE

In order to maintain the charm and character of Downtown Vernal, buildings above three stories are not recommended. Mixed-use for development or redevelopment is desired in the downtown and therefore, the intention is the first story is to be a commercial use and the second and third story (where applicable) is to be office or residential. The appropriate building height for a site depends on the context and exploring how the structure may overshadow an adjacent public space, the relationship to the street edge and other neighboring buildings, and the immediate streetscape character are all to be considered.

- >> Buildings not to exceed 3 stories or 40 feet.
- >> Buildings to have a mixture of uses where the first story is commercial or office and the second and third stories are office or residential.



Charleston, SC

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Steamboat Springs, CO

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

A5

AWNINGS AND SHADE

Awnings contribute to the streetscape and are used as an important design element, especially in historic storefronts. They offer protection from the sun and poor weather, as well as a way to add an identifying feature to a building.

- >> Awnings shall fill the openings above glass but not extend to cover structural piers of a storefront.
- >> Awnings to respect form of the windows and not introduce a new form.
- >> Fabric awnings encouraged.
- >> Backlit awnings shall not be used.



AWNING



Glenwood Springs, CO

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Wolfsville, Nova Scotia, Canada

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



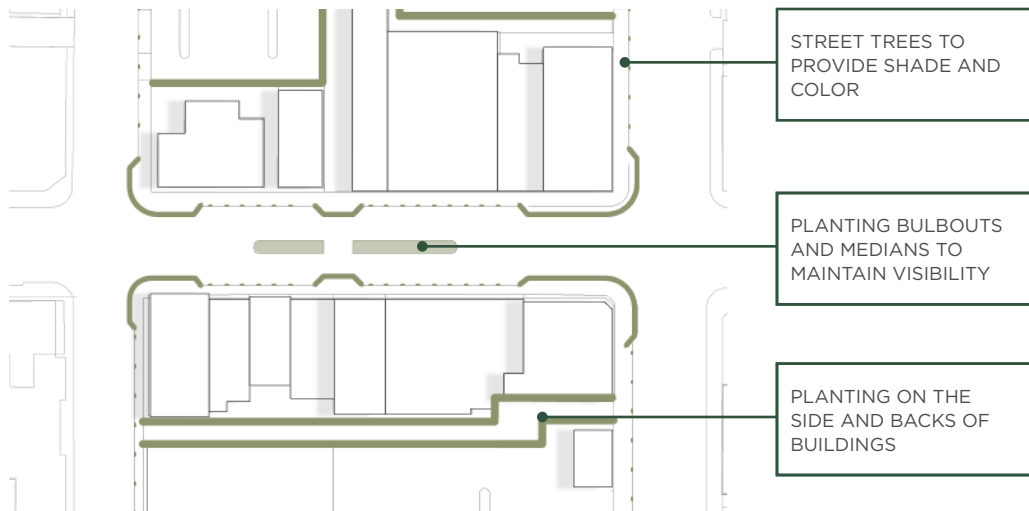
PUBLIC REALM

- P1** Planting
- P2** Signs and lighting
- P3** Sidewalk Design
- P4** Public Parking Lots

P1 PLANTING

Landscape areas shall support both the beauty and comfort of downtown with shade trees and evergreen shrubs to provide color during the winter when the downtown otherwise lacks color from plants. New development and redevelopment projects shall provide at minimum two of the following: potted plants, hanging planters, window planters, or small landscape buffer with shrubs between building and sidewalk.

- >> **Bulbouts provide additional planting areas on street corners.**
- >> **Medians on Mainstreet to be planted with low shrubs or perennials. Trees within Main Streets medians are not suitable due to high truck volume.**
- >> **Evergreen shrubs within planting beds and pots provide color during months without potted flowers.**
- >> **Back and side of buildings are also to provide plantings in the form of pots, planters, and vegetated strips.**



Narrowsburg, NY

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS



Denton, TX

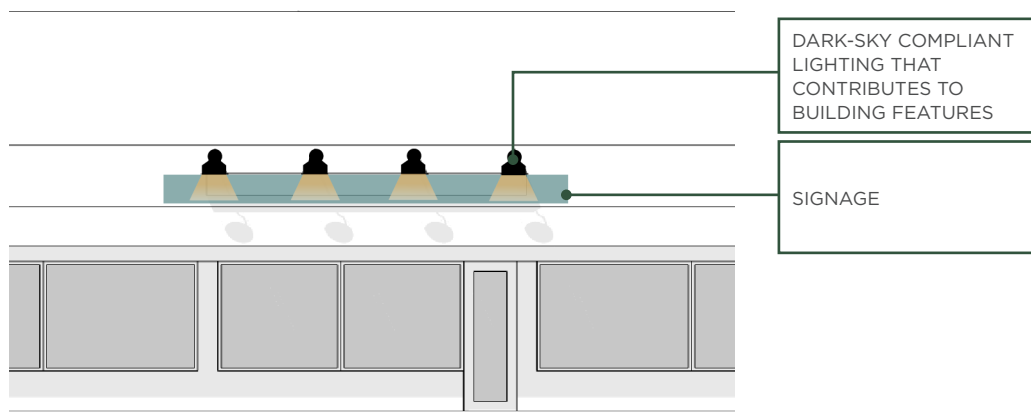
SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

P2

SIGNS AND LIGHTING

Signs and lighting serve to identify stores/ places of business as well as contribute to the continuity of building facades. Lighting contributes to the overall historic character of Downtown Vernal, as well as adhere to dark-sky initiatives whereby these fixtures minimize glare and reduce light trespass and skyglow.

- >> Signs shall be limited in number and contribute to the architecture of building.
- >> Signs shall not obscure display windows or significant building features.
- >> Electronic display signs are not to be used within the downtown.
- >> Fluorescent lights are not recommended to be used.



Logan Center Street



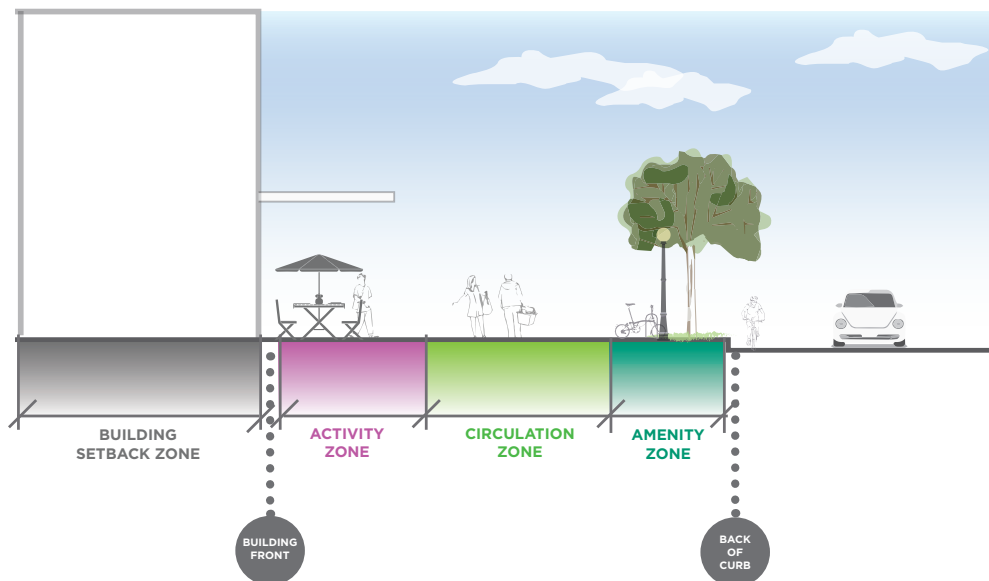
Dark-skies friendly ammonite lamppost, Dorset, UK

SOURCE: WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

P3 SIDEWALK DESIGN

A well-designed pedestrian realm increases the overall comfort, safety and success of a downtown environment. Sidewalk design that connects the public realm to ground floor activities is the ultimate goal with exterior uses and amenities to support and connect to interior activities. The sidewalk's design is to contain the following three zones:

- >> The Activity Zone is closest to the buildings and is means as a space businesses may use for purposes such as on-street dining and shopping.
- >> The Circulation Zone is the main path for pedestrians moving along the corridors and is to remain clear of obstructions.
- >> The Amenity Zone, located along the back of curb, is to feature street amenities such as planting, bike racks and lighting.
- >> Sidewalk material is a combination of concrete and pavers, both of which help to delineate zones.



Salt Lake City, UT



Casper, WY

SOURCE: BUILDING SALT LAKE/ISAAC RIDDLE.

P4

SURFACE PARKING LOTS

Parking lots with proper surfacing, lighting, and adequate signage, allows visitors and residents the ease and comfort of parking their car and walking to their desired destination. Good parking lot design will maximize the total number of parking spaces available and provide continuous flow of traffic through the lot, in addition to safe pedestrian movement and appropriate landscaping.

- >> Parking lots are to be accessible, safe, and functional, considering the needs for visitors and residents who have RVs and OHVs with appropriate space.
- >> Parking lot circulation and wayfinding should be obvious and simple.
- >> Parking lots are to be visually pleasing with considerations made for shade with planted islands and adequate lighting.



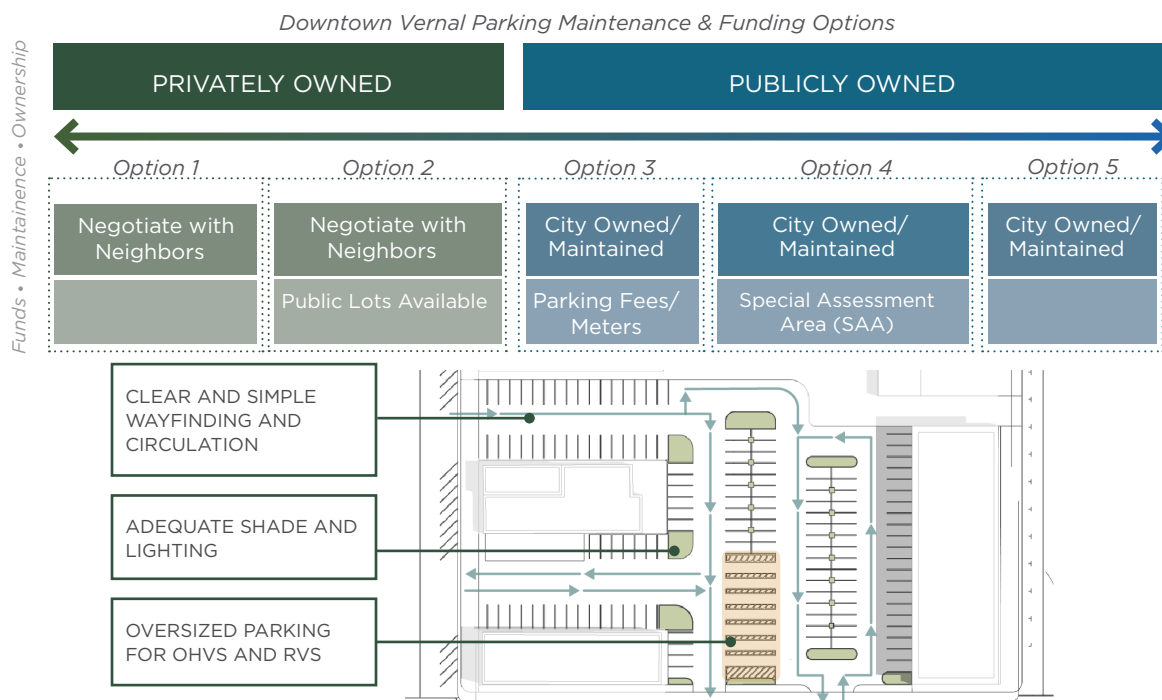
SOURCE: KSJ GREEN ENERGY CO.

Parking lot lighting



SOURCE: SCHNEIDER TREE

Parking lot trees



Parking is crucial to Downtown Vernal, and there is no one solution to enhancing and increasing parking. A balance of public and private interests and involvement should be addressed moving forward.



7. IMPLEMENTATION



IMPLEMENTATION

Prioritizing City improvements is always challenging, and that is especially true when it concerns amenities and services that residents care deeply about such as parks, trails, and recreation. It can be difficult when a community expresses diverse interests and has limited resources for investment. Given those considerations, this section aims to suggest a path forward for the City and County to prioritize the recommendations made in chapters 3-5.

PROJECT PRIORITIZATION

- How well does the project align with the guiding principles and goals established at the start of the master planning process?
- What is the demand for this project? Does it fill a critical need or service gap today? In the future? How does

the improvement address residents' needs?

- Where will funding come from? Are there resources currently set aside?
- What is the project's impact as it relates to costs? Which projects are urgent even though they may be costly?

This section is organized by presenting a framework for recommendations in this plan, a prioritized list of projects and policies the City can set into motion based upon that framework and insights gleaned through the planning process, a list of costs for each park improvement and enhancement, and a list of potential funding sources the City can use for these investments.

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations in this chapter are largely based on the economic drivers within Vernal and a market analysis of potential means and methods to make this vision a reality. Included in this are funding sources and a phasing strategy that leverages projects in the downtown that are most feasible based on existing land ownership, opportunity for land acquisition, and available grants and loans.

DEVELOPMENT REGULATIONS

Implementing the full scale of the Vernal Downtown Plan will take time, but the development of individual sections or elements can occur incrementally to achieve the vision established in this Plan. To ensure development occurs in alignment with this Plan, the City must review and update development regulations to ensure they align with this Plan. Additionally, the City must develop an actionable strategy that determines how it can incentivize growth and development to support and coalesce around Vernal's downtown.

DEVELOPMENT INCENTIVES

In order to catalyze growth and development at an expedited pace, the City will need to identify Economic Development incentives to create attention on the downtown area beyond market forces. The City is also in the process of creating a Community Reinvestment Area to allow for Tax Increment Financing to provide incentives to realize the types of quality development that Vernal would like to see in the downtown and identified in this plan.

CREATING PUBLIC SPACE

With Downtown Vernal's land use consisting of vacant property and opportunity for mid-block development, this plan explores different areas for public open space such as plazas, small parks, and Walking Boulevards. Additionally, the Public Space design envisions four acres of public and private land uses, including a great lawn for events, stage for concerts, a splash pad, climbing wall, and skating ribbon. To make this vision a reality, the City should develop a land acquisition strategy, offer incentives, and begin conversations as soon as possible to acquire the land that will build this network of open space through the downtown.



Umbrella Sky Project - Agueda, Portugal

SOURCE: PROJECT FOR PUBLIC SPACES

BRANDING AND MARKETING

With its nickname of “Dinosaurland,” Vernal first and foremost identifies as a dinosaur-themed town in Utah. But this is only one side of its multi-faceted identity. Given Vernal’s proximity to almost limitless outdoor recreation, it is also growing a reputation as a key destination for recreation.



Additionally, Vernal hosts a growing number of events each year that draws both local and out-of-state visitors, whether that’s the Dinah-SOAR Days Hot Air Balloon Festival or the Vernal Dinosaur Roundup Rodeo. So while the dinosaur theme will continue to play a significant role as Vernal’s identity evolves over the years, there is great opportunity to leverage the growing demand for outdoor recreation and events in this area.

The City should aim to take on a robust process of building community identity around the recreation opportunities and events. For example, the City can market their town to other cities, both within and outside the state, as a key destination for recreation tourism and events throughout the year. Hanging event banners across

Main Street can also draw in people and provide additional promotion for current or upcoming festivities and programs.



Dinah-SOAR Days Balloon

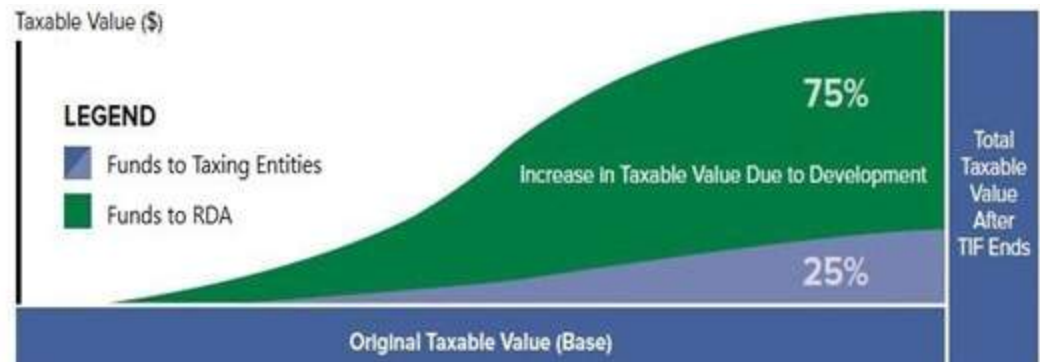
PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Summers Photography

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT TOOLS

Vernal should consider implementing specific policies to encourage the redevelopment and revitalization of its downtown. There are many tools available in the State of Utah, each with distinct advantages and potential limitations. These tools can operate independently or collectively. A proper application of the right tools in the correct areas will aid in reaching the vision of this plan and will increase the number of local options for employment, as well as creating vibrancy and energy in Downtown Vernal.

COMMUNITY REINVESTMENT AREA (CRA)

A CRA is the single tool most likely to prove beneficial to redeveloping Downtown Vernal. This tool allows the capture of incremental property tax revenues associated with increases in taxable values, with those gains to be spent within a defined project area. This tool is intended to aid projects that would not otherwise be built given existing market conditions. A city creates a project area plan for defined boundaries and outlines key objectives and purposes of the planned tax financing.



Appraisal Value to Time Correlation CRA

Vernal is in the process of creating a CRA that encompasses the downtown area included in this study. In talks with local taxing entities, the City has discussed obtaining 75 percent of increment for a CRA in the downtown and 25 percent of growth remaining with the respective tax agencies.

The governing body of a CRA is called the Redevelopment Agency (RDA) and is responsible for the budget of the area. Vernal will use funds captured in the CRA area for improvements of City property downtown, but the City is also developing a program to allow for use by local business and property owners such as a matching grant program for façade improvements. Other uses of funds could include landscaping, beautification, street furniture, signage, improved sidewalks, development incentives, utility infrastructure, or other public improvements.

The City may even choose to work with a downtown specialist to evaluate which properties have the greatest potential for return. By law, 10 percent of funds are required to be used for affordable housing.

Advantages of a CRA include:

- Flexibility in spending revenues
- New funds from other taxing entities are diverted to the Agency for a period of time for investment within a defined project area

Disadvantages of a CRA include:

- No incremental tax revenues are available unless development occurs within the specified time frame of the project area
- Other taxing entities may be reluctant to participate unless benefits are clearly presented to them

In the process of creating a CRA, Vernal has passed a resolution creating an RDA. Vernal's RDA has adopted bylaws and has adopted a survey area resolution authorizing the study of a specific area in the downtown.

Next, the RDA must draft a project area plan and budget. Details of the plan include boundaries, current land uses, objectives, programs, policies, and proposed amount of tax increment. Vernal will then notify the public of a hearing and conduct it while allowing residents to voice support or disapproval. Upon agreeing to any changes from feedback received, the Agency Board approves and adopts the plan by resolution. Following adoption by the Board, the City must adopt the plan by ordinance. After adopting the plan, the City must provide notice of the adoption of the plan.

Vernal residents have thirty days to contest the plan by providing specific ways that it does not comply with statutory law. After the 30 days, no citizen may contest it. At this point, the City files the plan with the Uintah County recorder, auditor, attorney, surveyor, and assessor, as well as the governing board of each taxing entity in the project area, the State Tax Commission, and the State Board of Education.

The budgeting process is similar to the area plan. The RDA prepares a budget and holds a public hearing on it. Citizens of Vernal have the option to attend the hearing and voice any concerns. The concerns are considered by the board of the RDA.

The budget is then adopted by resolution but, the RDA must secure interlocal agreements with the taxing entities before tax increment can be allocated to the Agency. Note that in practice the hearing on the project area plan and the budget are scheduled for the same meeting.

CRA STEPS

Steps	Activity	Completed
1	Agency (RDA) creation by resolution/ordinance	✓
2	Adoption of Agency bylaws	✓
3	Adoption of Survey Area Resolution by ordinance	✓
4	Perform Development Impediment Study (if eminent domain is expected)	
5	Draft Project Area Plan	
6	Hearing on Project Area Plan	
7	Approval and adoption of Plan by board resolution/ordinance	
8	Provide notice of Adoption	
9	Record plan with government agencies	
10	Create budget for the project area	
11	Gain budget approval through interlocal agreement	
12	Hearing on budget	
13	Budget adoption	

PUBLIC INFRASTRUCTURE DISTRICT (PID)

This development tool allows a city to establish specific requirements and guidelines for new construction. A PID is a financing tool that permits the PID to issue bonds against tax revenues or assessments created from the development. It requires 100 percent property ownership approval, so it typically relates to developments with only one or a few owners. A city can require specific development in “exchange” for approval of a PID, thereby allowing the city to have notable say in what type of development occurs at key sites. Vernal should consider adopting a PID policy that closely outlines its vision for a mixture of commercial and residential types.



Guiding development through PIDs

Advantages:

- Bonding is off the City’s books
- Those who benefit pay
- Cost is much lower than other development financing
- Can be used instead of impact fees and is a steady stream of revenue

Disadvantages:

- Willingness of all property owners to establish a PID
- Ongoing PID governance
- Competitiveness of site with additional taxes
- Cannot be used for operating expenses – public capital improvements only

SPECIAL ASSESSMENT AREAS

Special Assessment Areas (“SAAs”), formerly known as Special Improvement Districts or “SIDs”, are a financing mechanism that allows governmental entities to designate a specific area for the purpose of financing the costs of improvements, operation and maintenance, or economic promotion activities that benefit property within the area. Entities can then levy a special assessment, on parity with a tax lien, to pay for those improvements or ongoing maintenance. The special assessment can be pledged to retire bonds, known as Special Assessment Bonds, if issued to finance construction of a project.

The underlying rationale of an SAA is that only those property owners who benefit from the public improvements and ongoing maintenance of the properties will be assessed for the associated costs as opposed to other financing structures in which all City residents pay either through property taxes or increased service fees.

Advantages:

- Those who benefit pay
- Could be used in conjunction with tax increment, thereby encouraging development and use of increment to pay assessments

Disadvantages:

- Willingness of property owners to establish a SAA – requires 60 percent of more to agree (based on assessment method)
- Need to come up with equitable assessment method (taxable value, acreage, frontage, etc.) and clear policies.

The first step for Vernal will be deciding the scope of improvements to be made. Every block in the study area has existing parking lots, but most have been identified as areas that need improvements to be made.

Vernal should decide how much of the pavement needs to be redone, while other areas may just need better signage. Additionally, the City could also utilize SAA funds to provide some or all the walkways planned. The SAA can include all of the area that is intended to be improved throughout the downtown, and it does not require that every parcel in the Area be assessed.

Next, Vernal must decide how to assess the properties benefited by improvements. Utah Code states that the assessment must be an equitable portion of the benefit received. The City has options in choosing how to determine the assessment amount but should choose a method that is based on the benefits received from the new infrastructure.

One option is to levy an assessment based off expected utilization, where contributions are based off customers' and/or owners' use of the improvements. Similarly, if the assessment monies are used for parking and walkways, assessment amounts could be based off frontage to parking lots improved.

SAA Creation Steps

Steps	Activity	Primary	Recipient
1	Determine area boundaries and improvements covered	City Council	
2	Notice given of assessment area	City Council	
3	Optional waiver of right to appeal (for voluntary assessment area)	Property Owners	Property Owners
4	Protests to the City over assessment area	Property Owners	City Council
5	Hearing on assessment area	City Council	City Council
6	Public meeting to adopt assessment area by City resolution/ordinance	City Council	
7	Determination of assessment amounts per parcel	City Council	
8	Notice of assessment levy and hearing	City Council	Property Owners
9	Hearing on levy	Board of equalization	
10	Report on hearing findings	Board of equalization	City Council
11	Resolution/ordinance adopting assessment (along with notice)	City Council	
12	Report of funds and budget on City website	City Council	

Vernal can choose between two options, based on property owner sentiment. If the City can get support from every property owner in the area, the process can be shortened greatly through the creation of a voluntary assessment area. Otherwise, Vernal must give notice, allow for a hearing, and give property owners the opportunity to contest the creation.

In its notice, the City must provide a description of the area to be assessed, the assessment process and criteria, and the estimated cost of improvements to be made to the area. After the notice is posted publicly and sent to each property owner in the assessment area, Vernal must hold a hearing to listen to any comments on the proposed area. After a successful hearing (where 60 percent of property owners agree to the assessment area), the City can then choose to proceed and hold a public meeting to pass a resolution creating the assessment area.

Finally, prior to levying the assessment, Vernal must create a board of equalization comprised of three people, where 2-3 of them are members of the city council and the remaining appointments can be made from the treasury's office. The board reviews the levy issued by the City and holds a hearing to ensure that everything is in line with the provisions required by law. Afterwards, the City passes a resolution allowing for the assessment.

REVOLVING LOAN FUND

A revolving loan fund could be established, which could be available to local businesses for improvements that would meet the City's goals. The loans could be low or no-interest and could also include grant monies with a percentage of private matching funds required from the applicant.

COMMUNITY LAND TRUST (CLT)

If the RDA were to acquire land with its revenues, it might consider a CLT. A CLT is managed by a nonprofit business. The Trust acquires land and maintains ownership, separating the title to the land from the title to the built structures. This tool would allow the RDA to influence what could be built on its land.



GENERAL OBLIGATIONS BONDS

General obligation bonds are a common resource for funding major capital facilities that benefit the entire community. General obligation bonds, commonly referred to as “G.O. bonds,” are generally the least costly form of financing for capital facilities. They attract the lowest interest rates in the market because they are secured by the “full faith and credit” - the unlimited pledge of the taxing ability of the community and therefore have the least credit risk to investors.

Advantages:

- Lowest cost form of borrowing
- ‘New’ source of revenues identified

Disadvantages:

- Timing issues – limited date to hold required G.O. election
- Risk of a “no” vote while still incurring costs of holding a bond election
- Possibility of election failure due to lack of perceived benefit to majority of voters
- Must levy property tax on all property even if some properties receive limited or no benefit from the proposed improvements
- Can only bond for physical facilities, not ongoing or additional operation and maintenance expense

VERNAL PROGRAMS

Some of the improvements to be made in the downtown area can be paid for by City and County funds. Vernal already has budgeting in place to perform upkeep on city roads, and some of the renovations can be paid for through the general fund.

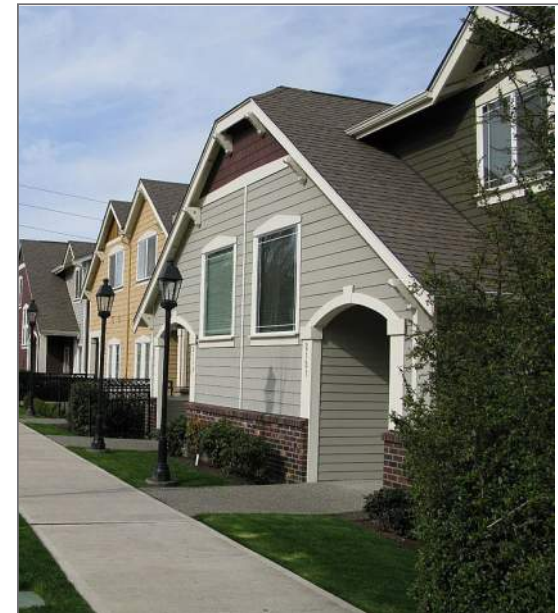
UTAH PROGRAMS

Although its purpose is mainly to provide guidance, the Utah Main Street Program, sponsored by the Governor’s Office of Economic Opportunity, will occasionally provide grants to smaller cities. Funds obtained this way can also be used as a match for façade improvements by downtown property owners or for other downtown projects. For residential projects, the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) could help the City with affordable housing as necessary. Vernal has received a CDBG grant, and officials are therefore familiar with this process. Another familiar process for the City includes CIB loans through the Permanent Community Impact Fund Board. Vernal will use loans and/or grants through this program to help fund some improvements to the downtown.

FEDERAL PROGRAMS

Vernal should become familiar with the federal government’s System for Award Management or SAM. Most of the federal grants available to cities can be researched and applied for through this web-administered program, such as Land and Wildlife Conservation grants or grants available for brownfield environmental concerns.

Additionally, the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) has made funds available for municipalities to spend on infrastructure. Vernal plans to use some of these funds to build up the downtown area.



EDUCATION OF PLAN

Because of the many stakeholders, it is essential that those who have participated in the creation of this plan continue to share its concepts with those unfamiliar to it. Some of the tools that will be in place because of this plan will be unfamiliar to some stakeholders and outreach by City officials will help small business and property owners take advantage of programs that will be offered.

EXISTING PROCESSES

As a detailed vision within a defined area, this plan provides ideas and concepts to help improve Vernal's downtown. The ideas herein should be added to current regulatory checklists so that developers and public servants continue working together to achieve common goals. City officials will ensure that new development requests capture the vision of the plan before approval is given

PLAN AVAILABILITY

The plan should be included on Vernal's website for everyone to see. Additionally, the City can consider having physical copies available to anyone who would benefit from reviewing the Plan while at City Hall.

PLAN AVAILABILITY

The Downtown Committee should plan to review the plan a minimum of two times each year. The first review should take place in the spring in anticipation of project activities during the summer.

The second review will be an evaluation of the season's progress in the fall. The Committee should be charged with presenting their findings and recommendations to the city council after each review, and it is recommended that the City review the plan each year before the Downtown Committee's spring review.



Community engagement and design workshops with stakeholders

PROJECT TIMELINE

It is said that a proper method to achieve great things starts with a vision, moves on to goals, and is completed with steps to accomplish the goals. This plan started with the City's vision for downtown revitalization which led to the formulation of goals designed to capture the vision. The timeline will help provide the steps for the City to reach its vision.

The table below shows a general timeline for the projects listed in this plan. The projects are not listed in chronological order but are grouped by similarity. The timeframe column shows when a project could start; a “short” designation means that the project will start in the next year or two, and a “medium” designation implies that the project will start later. In the cost column, one dollar sign represents \$1 million. For example, “\$” represents up to \$1 million, while “\$\$” represents an estimated cost of \$1 to \$2 million. Finally, potential funding sources for each project are given as a guide for how the projects can be financed. Actual financing for projects may vary from the list given, and the source listing does not signify approval from the respective agency. See Timeline table on following page for details.

Following this general timeline will help the goals of the plan become reality. While some of the timeframe elements may need to be adjusted slightly, Vernal's vision for downtown is certainly attainable. With help from stakeholders throughout the process, the goals will soon be achieved.



Consistent Street Facades, Bozeman, MT

Timeline					
Project		Year	Category	Cost	Potential Funding
1	Small Business Incentives	2022	Built Environment	\$\$\$	CRA Increment
2	Façade Improvement Incentives	2022			
3	Building Demolition Incentives	2022			
4	Historic Sign Incentives	2022			
5	Recreational Opportunities	2022-'23	Community	\$\$	County, city, private, and RMP grant funds
6	Pickleball Courts	2022			
7	Rock Climbing Wall	2023			
8	Ice Skating Rink / Spray Pad	2023			
9	Mountain Bike Pumptrack	2023			
10	Public Space	2022-'24	Built Environment	\$\$\$	CIB loans, brownfield grants, revitalization funds, and rural economic grants
11	Property Acquisition, Public Space Construction	2022, 2023-'24			
12	Vernal Information Center	2023			
13	Walking Boulevards and Public Parking	2022-'26	Streetscape	\$\$	Rural economic grant
14	Zions Block	2022			
15	Cobblerock Block	2023			
16	Sage Block	2024			
17	7-11 Block	2025			
18	Chamber Block	2026			
19	Farm Exchange Block	2026			
20	Road Improvements	2023-'26	Transportation	\$\$\$	UDOT grant, federal earmarks, CIB grant, city, and revitalization funds
21	Vernal Avenue	2023			
22	Main Street	2023			
23	100 East	2024			
24	100 West	2026			
25	Streetscape, art, and sculptures	2023-'25			
26	High Profile Tourist Attraction	2024			

TRANSPORTATION IMPLEMENTATION

Implementing the overall vision for street improvements within the Downtown Study Area will require ongoing and close coordination with UDOT, communication and coordination with downtown business owners, community buy-in, public-private partnerships, and a variety of different funding mechanisms for both physical improvements and ongoing maintenance.

If funding is constrained, phasing priorities should be based on the high/low impact high/low investment graphic depicted on this page. Improvements should be focused on high impact/low investment first, moving to low impact/low investment, high impact/high investment, and then low impact/high investment.

Following the implementation of suggested improvements on Main Street and Vernal Avenue South of Main, continuing to make improvements along Vernal Avenue south of Main Street would be the next set of recommended improvements.

Following the implementation of improvements on Main Street and Vernal Avenue, Vernal City should evaluate traffic count data on Vernal facilities and begin to improve sections based on level of impact.

The diagram on the following page articulates the impact and investment classification for major improvements identified within this Vernal Downtown Plan.



TRANSPORTATION PROJECT PHASING MATRIX

If funding is available, it is recommended that Vernal City focus improvements on areas that would see the highest benefit based on the roadway sections that serve the highest traffic volumes.

Those highest traffic volume segments also correspond with UDOT ownership (Main Street, Vernal Avenue north of Main Street). It is recommended that those sections receive the highest priority and be undertaken together through coordination with UDOT.

HIGH IMPACT/ LOW INVESTMENT

STREET TYPOLOGY ELEMENTS

- Parking changes (striping and applicable signage)
- Large vehicle parking (if possible to utilize/re-purpose an existing off-street parking area)

MAIN ST.

- Center Medians (physical improvements and landscaping. May require ongoing maintenance.
- Bulb-outs (physical improvements)

LOW IMPACT/HIGH INVESTMENT

STREET TYPOLOGY ELEMENTS

- Transit wayfinding and bus stop improvements

HIGH IMPACT/HIGH INVESTMENT

STREET TYPOLOGY ELEMENTS

- Enhance Sidewalks and streetscape amenities (physical improvements to sidewalks, curb, adding amenities)
- Bulb-outs (physical improvements)
- Large vehicle parking (if necessary to create a new parking area)

LOW IMPACT/LOW INVESTMENT

STREET TYPOLOGY ELEMENTS

- Bicycle facilities (striping)

Transportation Impact-Investment Analysis

THE DOWNTOWN MASTER PLAN PATH FORWARD

This Master Plan is considered a “Living Document” because it is anticipated that the plan will be monitored over time to determine how effective it is and whether it is necessary to make updates. That makes this plan always in a state of “becoming.”

In consistent evaluations of this Vernal Downtown Plan, it is possible to identify trends so that decision makers can determine if changes in policy, programs, or new projects is required. The diagram on the following page articulates a proposed decision making tree that identifies:

- 1. **Who** is to be involved in the assessing the plan’s success and ongoing efforts.*
- 2. **What** questions are to be asked to determine whether the plan is on track or not.*
- 3. **How** to modify the plan based on the level of changes needed.*



Cobble Rock Park

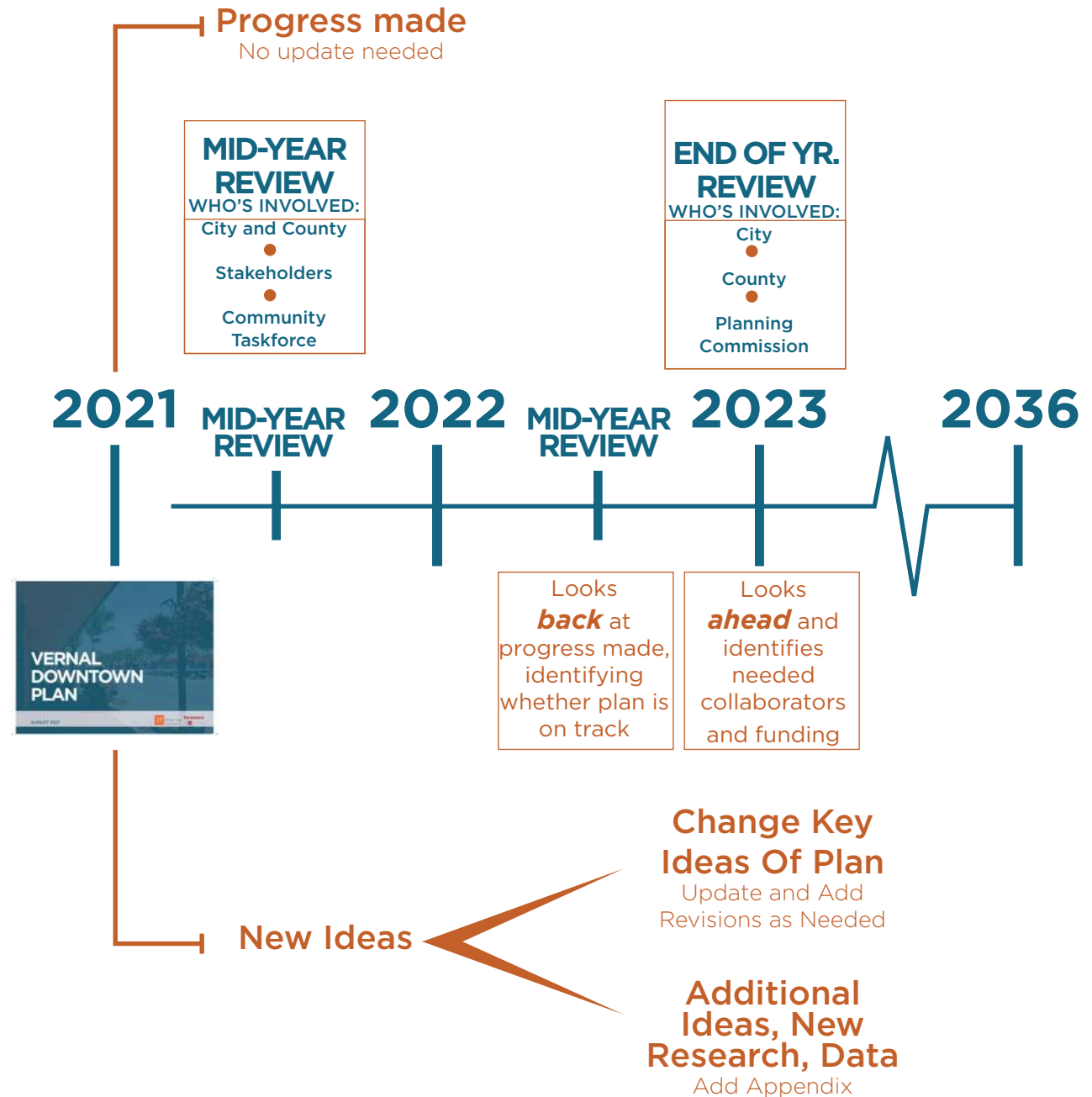
The desired outcome of this Vernal Downtown Plan is to maintain the things that are working and make modifications/ eliminate the things that are not working, always with this vision of a more vibrant Downtown Vernal in mind. As the Vernal Downtown Plan evolves and tasks along the timeline are in the early stages of planning and implementation, the City will need to identify the consultants, collaborators, and funding sources. There are two annual opportunities for the City to meet with stakeholders, community members, and the City Council and County Commission:

MID-YEAR: LOOKS AT THE PLAN'S PROGRESS TO DATE

- Is the plan still current, meeting needs of the community?
- Does the Vernal Downtown Plan have parts which may need updating?
- Is the Vernal Downtown Plan still viable?

END-OF-YEAR: LOOKS AT THE YEAR AHEAD

- Determine what projects are to be accomplished in the coming year.
- Identify who will be engaged to accomplish those projects.
- Determine what the funding sources are and how best to secure them.



APPENDICES

- **APPENDIX A:**
*Vernal Downtown Plan Project Foundations:
Existing Conditions Report April 2021*
- **APPENDIX B:**
Public Engagement Summary

PHOTO CREDIT: Becca Summers Photography